CASTLES IN THE AIR;

OR, THE

WHIMS OF MY AUNT.

VOL. I.

Printed by S. Hamilton, Whitefriars.

CASTLES IN THE AIR;

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A NOVEL.

BY THE AUTHORESS OF

"DUNETHVIN; OR, A VISIT TO PARIS."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR BALDWIN, CRADOCK, AND JOY,

PATERNOSTER ROW.

1818.

CASTLES IN THE AIR;

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WHIMS OF MY AUNT.

CHAPTER I.

See some fit passion every age supply,
Hope travels through, nor quits us when we die.
* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *
Meanwhile Opinion gilds with varying rays
Those painted clouds that beautify our days;
Each want of happiness by Hope supplied,
And each vacuity of sense by Pride:
These build as fast as knowledge can destroy;
In Folly's cup still laughs the bubble joy;
One prospect lost, another still we gain;
And not a vanity is given in vain.

POPE.

——— ——— I sum up half mankind,
And add two thirds of the remaining half,
And find the total of their hopes and fears
Dreams, empty dreams!

COWPER.

"WHEN Charles shall have brought me the Persian manuscript of Hafiz the

poet, I shall quite outrival Lady Blandish with her favourite Chinese characters, which have puzzled one half of the learned world, and filled the other half with envy and malice," said Mrs. Denningham, half unconscious that she was then thinking aloud, while her hands were busily employed (as if mechanically) in knitting a purse.

"Did you speak to me, aunt?" inquired a fine handsome boy, who sat opposite to the soliloquist, engaged at her desire in drawing a map of Asia.

"Yes, my love, I am thinking what I should like you to bring me from Persia," said she; "I mean when you go in the suite of the ambassador, as I make no doubt you will: you will then of course have great interest, and may

perhaps be able to gain me that inestimable treasure, the manuscript poems of Hafiz in the original language."

"Dear aunt, you are not going to send me to Persia, are you?" said Charles Denningham, in utter amazement, and yet with something of an arch expression lurking in his dark eyes, as he raised them towards the countenance of his aunt.

Charles Denningham was, at the time now alluded to, just of an age to observe the peculiarities and frequent fits of absence, which were but too evident in the conduct of Mrs. Denningham, who had long acquired the habit of amusing herself by laying plans for the future, while the present time was by her totally disregarded: her life had

been, what may well be termed a varied dream of wild chimeras, and fanciful illusions.—Too often the valuable blessings of leisure, health, and competence had been idly wasted in the pursuit of some favourite plan, neither advantageous to herself nor others. She had weakened a noble mind, and frittered away a superior understanding by these frivolous and vain pursuits, in *all* of which it was impossible for her to succeed, however successful she might be in part. Disappointment had tinctured her disposition with a melancholy, which was not natural to it; for her early youth had given a promise of brilliant talents, and uncommon wit and vivacity; but a lively imagination, entirely uncontrolled, had long banished that more intrinsic merit, sound sense, and launched its fair possessor on a world of improbability and

folly. She had for years been the willing dupe of the wild phantoms, which existed only in her own inventive brain: she had lived in an ideal world; and this she had compared so frequently with the passing events of that she in reality existed in, that she sometimes persuaded herself, that not only the inhabitants, but the whole system of the earth itself was changed from what it was formerly. "All could not be right, or why should she be so often misled in her opinions?" she would mentally exclaim. She staid not to consider the utter impracticability of her various schemes, and the consequent disappointment which must inevitably follow them: she again wove the fragile web of fancy, and again amused herself with plans, which were as certainly to be frustrated. Yet, amidst this career of folly, Mrs. Denningham had

preserved a generous heart, a kind and gentle disposition: keenly alive to the dictates of affection and compassion, she had not scrupled to sacrifice her own interest, her own ideas of comfort, to befriend the helpless orphan, or to serve the afflicted mourner. For this, and many other traits of character equally favourable, she had gained the esteem of those, who knew enough of her real excellence to enable them to overlook the singularity of her conduct in many respects, and the frequent eccentricity of her manners and way of reasoning. She was beloved by her relatives and dependents, but ridiculed by the unthinking, and set down by the generality of her acquaintance as "a complete quiz, a crack-brained visionary:" they contented themselves with laughing at the follies of Mrs. Denningham, but

they sought not to imitate her many virtues.

At the commencement of this narrative, she had attained her fortieth year; and, having resigned the maiden title of Miss, had assumed that more sedate distinction of Mrs. She had had many offers in her youthful days; but among all her admirers, finding none who came up to her idea of excellence, (founded on romance, and existing only in the imagination,) she had determined to continue unmarried. This rather singular determination many of her relations were surprised at, but none attempted to dissuade her from; each hoping that the large fortune she was known to possess would in time fall to their share. But these selfish anticipations were suddenly baffled by the untimely death of

Mrs. Denningham's sister-in-law; who, in giving birth to her third child, had given up her own valued existence, and left a disconsolate husband and three lovely children to sustain her irreparable loss.

As the wife of her brother, the late Mrs. Denningham, had been beloved in life, and in death claimed the grief of our amiable visionary, who felt and acknowledged the virtues of the deceased with all that candour and warmth which had ever strongly marked her very singular character; she affectionately soothed the deep affliction of her brother, and promised to become a tender guardian to his helpless infants, the eldest of whom was not, at the death of their mother, more than six years of age.

Unable as he was himself to superin-

tend the management of so young a family, Mr. Denningham gladly embraced the well-meant offer of his sister; and consigned his infant darlings to the entire care of their aunt, with the most unbounded confidence in her tenderness towards those lovely orphans, whom from that hour Mrs. Denningham determined to consider as her own. She hesitated not to declare it her intention to divide the whole of her property equally among them.

This liberality to her nephew and nieces did not fail to dissipate the bright hopes of her mercenary relations; who had previously courted her favour with unabated assiduity, and scrupled not to countenance, by their flattery, the many ridiculous caprices which they secretly laughed at and despised: they hoped

thus to hoodwink her judgment, and, by indulging her follies, to ensure their own selfish plans and skilful calculations; but they had unwittingly deceived themselves. Instead of making Mrs. Denningham their dupe, as they had intended, she saw through their shallow devices and mean contemptible artifices; and she resolved to dispose of her large fortune to more satisfactory purposes, by bequeathing it to more deserving objects. Her brother, she knew, could himself have well provided for his children, had not severe losses of late much impaired his income: but she likewise knew the extreme uncertainty of West India property; she had herself sometimes experienced this in the irregularity with which her own remittances were paid from the same estates, and managed by the same agent as Mr. Denning-

ham's. Her brother was young; he might marry again, she argued: another family would then have claims on him; and she could not endure the idea of her little favourites being under the control of a stepmother; having the unjust prejudice which many indulge in, that a second wife seldom if ever behaves with kindness to the children of the first.

Disregarding the insinuations of her pretended friends, that she would soon repent of encumbering herself with the care of a family not her own, and that the charge of such infants would be attended with great inconvenience to one of her peculiar turn of mind, Mrs. Denningham set about arranging the domestic establishment of her household for the reception of her little nephew and nieces. A commodious suite of apart-

ments was fitted up for them and their attendants, with the strictest regard to their health and comfort: she herself superintended every thing, that she might the better attend to the preparations for receiving those interesting objects of her affection: for them she threw aside her former favourite pursuits, and became more than commonly domestic and devoted to her family affairs.

As soon as possible after the funeral of their ill-fated mother, Charles, Laura, and the infant Julia were removed from their father's splendid but now desolate mansion to that of their worthy aunt.

Mrs. Denningham with difficulty overcame the reluctance of the affectionate father to part with these lovely pledges of former happiness. He could not re-

sign the children of his beloved, but now departed Julia, without a pang of regret; not even to his own amiable sister, much as he loved her. He yet felt the deepest grief when the attendants bore them from that dwelling which had hitherto sheltered them, and where the fond bosom of a tender parent had so lately fostered them. He doubted not the tenderness of their aunt, and that she would zealously endeavour to supply the loss of her who had till now watched over them with all a mother's fond anxiety; but, bereaved of the society of his children, the last hope of comfort seemed snatched from the wretched widower.

Mrs. Denningham perceived the inward struggle, and, pitying the sufferings of her brother, entreated him to make

her house his home, at least for the first few months after their removal. She hoped the change of scene, and the satisfaction of beholding his children continually, would wean him from his present melancholy reflections.

Her proposal was gladly accepted; and, in the superintendence of his son's education, and the affectionate endearments of his little girls, Mr. Denningham in time forgot the first poignancy of his grief, and passed his hours more agreeably than he could once have thought possible after the death of his wife.

As before mentioned, the eldest of Mrs. Denningham's children was but six years of age when deprived of her maternal care by her sudden and unex-

pected death; the second child, Laura, was just three years younger than her brother Charles; the third, the infant Julia, never knew a mother's love, a mother's fond embrace: death had snatched its victim ere she had the power to welcome the hapless babe, or imprint one fervent kiss of affection on its innocent lips.

Charles, from being the only boy, became the pride and delight of his father, who regarded him as his greatest hope, the object of his love and ambition. Mr. Denningham believed he could, even at that early age, trace in the expanding faculties of his son the bright promise of superior talents: the cultivation of his mind would require peculiar attention while young; if well directed in his pursuit of knowledge, he

might one day become an ornament to society, and a blessing to himself.

Such were the fair promises of earthly happiness, which brightened the prospects of future years to Mr. Denningham; but not two years had elapsed; ere the fallacy of these hopes was proved by the dread certainty, that he should never behold these bright visions realized: he was called from the contemplation of terrestial bliss to that of celestial purity.

After the death of her brother, Mrs. Denningham became, if possible, still more devoted to his orphan children, who now had only her to be their guide and protection. They had indeed, other relations, but none who interested themselves for their welfare beyond what

selfish motives could dictate; and who would have totally disregarded them, but from the wish to have the guardianship of their property: none, from affection only, would have given a home to these helpless babes. Not being very nearly related, they felt not the tie of affection, which Mrs. Denningham did; they looked only to the emolument, which would arise from having the estates of their deceased relative under their own management; for it was not then generally known how much his fortune had been impaired.

Mr. Denningham, at the earnest request of his sister, had placed his daughters under her sole guardianship; and while his son was under the age of ten years, he too was to reside with his aunt; but after that period, till he should

be of age, Charles Denningham was to be under the joint guardianship of Mrs. Denningham, and sir George Alvington, a gentleman who had contrived, by a pleasing address, and an assumption of those virtues he in fact did not possess, to ingratiate himself into the good opinion of the late Mr. Denningham, to whom he was distantly related.

Mrs. Denningham was certainly the most affectionate and natural guardian that her brother could have selected for his children, and her anxiety for their welfare in every respect never abated; but the extreme variability of her mind, the unsteadiness, caprice, and folly, which in such frequent instances guided her conduct, rendered her the most unfit person in the world to superintend the management of children. She

was ever changing her plans either with regard to their health or education. Every new whim of fashion or custom prevalent among her numerous acquaintance she was eager to adopt; her own better judgment was rendered entirely useless by the silly predilection for every thing that was new: change (if I may so express myself) seemed the rule of her life: always fancying, that what another adopted must be better than her own method, she was never steady to any one plan, however rational. To such a height of folly did she carry this ridiculous conceit, that had not the children been of naturally robust constitutions, they must have fallen victims to her various experiments, all meant solely for their good.

At one time, she was told by a female

friend, that it was best to inure the children to the cold of the climate they inhabited, and, of course, to commence by lessening the warmth of their clothing, and to use the cold bath frequently. This in itself might be very proper, if acted upon with due precaution; but unfortunately it was late in the autumn when the plan was suggested; and just at the time when they should have commenced the use of their winter habiliments, the little Denninghams were stripped of even a part of their summer clothing, and with only a thin cambric frock and petticoat, no gloves or stockings, they were exposed to the baleful influence of the cold autumnal blast. This extravagant whim, as may be supposed, failed not to disappoint our visionary: with the utmost consternation she found that, instead of becom-

ing more healthy, the children were seized with severe colds, attended with fever to an alarming degree. After the first danger of this attack was past, Mrs. Denningham resolved to hasten to town, and consult the most eminent physicians, for the recovery of their health: this was at length effected, except that a teasing cough still continued to weaken the delicate frame of the infant Julia. This was a source of anxiety to Mrs. Denningham, which would not admit of consolation. It was in vain she was told the child would gradually get the better of this complaint: not content with the prescriptions of the medical gentlemen who attended her niece, she retarded her recovery, by successively administering every sort of julep, powder, and mixture, which she heard recommended as a sovereign remedy by

her numerous acquaintance: she even attended the infant herself, that all might be given it which she falsely judged would be beneficial. Her own health and spirits were materially injured by her over anxiety and self-reproach for having acted in the manner she had done; but this did not give her the experience one should have expected: she lamented the having caused her darling so much suffering, but was as ready again as ever to be led away by some new caprice.

A lady was condoling with her one day on the anxiety she lately experienced, and entreated her to adopt her method of treating children.—"For my part, I never suffer my little ones to go out the whole winter," said she; "they never leave the house."

"Never go out! what not in the carriage?" exclaimed Mrs. Denningham; "surely that plan cannot succeed. What! never take the fresh air for so many months together?" added she with evident surprise and doubt.

The visitor then proceeded to explain her peculiar way of management, which was to have a large and airy suite of apartments fitted up, and never suffer her children to go beyond them during the winter, not even to take an airing in the carriage. This was certainly not so decidedly dangerous as the plan Mrs. Denningham had lately adopted; but she feared it would make her little nephew and his sisters extremely delicate. The method however was certainly new, quite unlike any former one she had ever heard of; it might therefore be

beneficial: she would try it, she was resolved: it could not injure the dear little creatures for one winter only. Thus she argued; and in spite of her own exclamation of surprise at the bare mention of such a singular way of proceeding, she immediately adopted it.

At another time, having heard that the food of children should be sparingly given, especially animal food, and that each child should be allowed to eat only a certain quantity, by no means to be exceeded, Mrs. Denningham, according to this new suggested plan, had the meat allowed to each weighed in her presence, that not the least mistake should be made: these portions were not (even to the eldest) to exceed an ounce and half; and, spite of all their

entreaties, she would not hear of either of the poor children having more than the due proportion assigned to each.

A lady, happening to call on Mrs. Denningham one morning, found her engaged in reading the manners of the modern Arabs. She extolled the great abstemiousness of their diet, "which no doubt," she said, "produced that degree of uncommon shrewdness, for which they were distinguished."

Charles during this conversation had been overlooking the plates in the book his aunt had just laid aside. Among the number which took his attention was that of an Arabian courser: this from its slight and delicate proportions appeared to him the most singular. Placing

it before his aunt, he said, "I suppose, aunt, the Arabians don't let their horses have as much as they can eat, any more than their children; see, this one looks very thin! I dare say his master weighed his meat, as you do ours. Laura and I shall very soon do to live with these people; we shall soon be as thin as they or their horses; look, aunt, don't you think we shall?" said he, baring his own little arm, and pointing to that of his sister who was playing near him.

This appeal was not lost on Mrs. Denningham. She perceived the children did not thrive under their abstemious regimen, and reluctantly resigned the plan of giving added brilliancy to their mental talents, by depriving them of bodily nourishment: she kissed the

child, told him "she believed it would not do,"—and from that hour he and his sisters were allowed to eat as much as formerly.

CHAPTER II.

At the age of ten years, Charles Denningham was, at the desire of his guardian, sir George Alvington, placed under the care of a clergyman, who resided not far from the country residence of Mrs. Denningham. This latter circumstance was a source of great consolation to her. Beside the high opinion she entertained of Mr. Morland (the gentleman alluded to), she rejoiced that, however necessary it was for her nephew to leave her, she should not be wholly denied the satisfaction of seeing him; and she felt convinced, that with his worthy and considerate preceptor,

Charles would not miss those comforts he had ever been accustomed to when with her. For the first few months of his absence, she was never easy but when she was either going to see him, or receiving accounts of his health: this degree of anxiety was at length lessened by the conviction, that the object of her solicitude was quite resigned to his separation from her and his sisters, by a promise from his guardian that he should be allowed to spend the next vacation with them in London.

Charles Denningham had been an inmate at the vicarage two years when this narrative commenced, and had been again permitted to visit his aunt Mrs. Denningham; who, proud of his rapid improvement under the well directed tuition of Mr. Morland, already began

to look into futurity, with the firm belief that her nephew would one day shine a bright example of superior merit. The theme of his praises never wearied her ear; he and her favourite Laura shared her unbounded affection almost to adoration: for them she laid plans, foretold future greatness, and dwelt so long and so ardently on these hopes, that it was with difficulty she could allow the probability of their failure; they were the source of her present comfort, and future anticipations. Charles might indeed be said to justify these flattering illusions, both by the excellence of his disposition and his superior talents: at twelve years of age he was a boy of the most promising genius. According to the wish of his father, he was to be made perfectly conversant in the oriental languages; as he was, when old

enough, and had completed his education, to embark for India, where a friend of the late Mr. Denningham had promised to forward his interest, and to obtain a high appointment for the youth in the Company's service.

This circumstance had so strongly impressed itself on the mind of Mrs. Denningham, that she had suffered her imagination, as usual, to gain the ascendency over reason; and went on so long fancying the probable high rank her nephew would in a few years obtain, that she at length took it for granted beyond all doubt, and began to build her hopes accordingly. If any one was said to be skilled in languages, "she was sure her Charles would one day surpass them,"—or if an embassy was alluded to, she regretted that he was

not yet old enough to be sent to India, for "she was certain he would in that case be chosen as one in the suite of the ambassador." Maps of Asia were explored and consulted, as to the relative situation of the countries he would be likely to traverse: all India was considered as the scene of his future greatness; while the unconscious boy, the object of these high-flown ideas, was assiduously employed in finishing a beautiful map with scrupulous exactness, in order to please his aunt, to whom he was tenderly attached. While he was thus engaged, the good old lady was not idle (at least in thought). She had lately much wished to outrival a fair member of the learned *coterie* which she sometimes attended: this lady had obtained, by means of her *interest* with a certain noble lord, some very rare and beautiful

Chinese characters, which he had himself brought from the court of Pekin: this valued prize was enough to excite the wonder and envy of an assemblage of learned ladies, whose society Mrs. Denningham had been induced to become a member of, solely from the wish for novelty and the charm of notoriety.

During one of these discourses of our *Bas Bleus*, the poems of Hafiz became the topic of conversation: all agreed in their elegance and beautiful simplicity. The thought suddenly struck our romantic visionary, that a manuscript of these invaluable poems in the original language would be the most desirable acquisition in the world. As she sat at work, contemplating, as usual, the future prospects of her nephew, she determined that he should obtain for her the

desired treasure when he should be in India; for he would doubtless then travel through the adjacent countries of Asia in some capacity or other, perhaps in the suite of some embassy; and "who knows if Charles might not himself arrive at the dignity of being chosen ambassador; why should he not?"—Thus Mrs. Denningham argued; and my readers will now perceive the origin of that singular remark, which occasioned so much surprise to Charles Denningham, as mentioned in the first page of this work. He, who had not traced the rise and progress of his own destiny in the fertile imagination of his aunt, was at a loss to comprehend her meaning: he smiled, incredulous that he had heard rightly; yet so accustomed was he to her abstracted air and singular notions, that, child as he was, he doubted not for a

moment that this too was one of the "whims of my aunt."

With amiable attention to her feelings, he strove to repress the smile that brightened his lively countenance, and the expression of mirth that, spite of himself, beamed in his sparkling eyes; as Mrs. Denningham explained her wish for the Persian manuscript, and the hopes she had of obtaining it by his means.

Laura, less scrupulous, laughed aloud at the idea of her aunt having already determined what Charles should get for her, when he should be a man. She was an intelligent child of her age; but too presuming and free in her manners towards her aunt, who increased this failing by her visible partiality, and ex-

treme indulgence of this her favourite niece; who, having been named after her, and esteemed uncommonly like her in features, was early the little pet of her aunt. This Laura was quick-sighted enough to perceive: she could, she was well aware, by her entreaties make Mrs. Denningham consent to whatever she wished; and, since the absence of her brother, this ascendency had greatly increased.

Julia, now six years of age, though by far a more engaging child, was not so much regarded by her aunt. More diffident and timid in disposition, she had been accustomed to yield in every particular to the caprice of her elder sister: it was not that Mrs. Denningham countenanced this injustice knowingly; but her partiality for Laura blinded her to

the frequent instances of a tyrannical disposition, which her favourite evinced towards her sister Julia; who, gentle and amiable in temper, good-naturedly gave up any wish of her own to oblige Laura or her aunt. Even at her early age she could perceive the difference of Charles's behaviour; and his affectionate tenderness sunk deep in the mind of our heroine (as we shall henceforward consider her): no absence of after years could efface from her memory the impression which his kindness had made; she loved him with the most devoted affection.

Charles was ever her firmest advocate in any little dispute, that occasionally arose between the sisters. He loved them both; but Julia was in his estimation the most amiable: he could not

endure to see her teased by the caprices of Laura without interfering; though it sometimes displeased his aunt, when he was unusually severe in his reproaches on Laura for her unkindness and tyranny to such a sweet-tempered child as Julia. This altercation only served to increase the ill nature of Laura, who never failed to complain of any little neglect, or childish misdemeanor, Julia had unfortunately been guilty of.

Mrs. Denningham, any one would have imagined, had she made any difference in her treatment of the children, would have made the youngest her pet, from the poor little creature's having been so early deprived of a mother, and taken almost from the hour of her birth to be placed under her guardianship; but from a strange perverseness, which

she herself could not account for, Laura was preferred to her sister, though Julia was by her aunt allowed to be not so unmanageable as Laura, and without doubt of a much better temper: this, even in spite of her partiality to her elder niece, Mrs. Denningham was compelled to admit.—" But then Laura was so lively and engaging a girl; she had besides been her first adopted child," from the circumstance of her having stood godmother to Laura previous to the death of her mother. Mrs. Denningham argued too, that no kind of difference could be perceived in her treatment of her nieces; therefore, she could not be said to wrong Julia by her preference for Laura: this the old lady herself believed was true; but no one else could be deceived: it was but too visible who was the favourite.

Naturally cheerful and contented, Julia endured the unkind and sometimes malicious behaviour of Laura without repining; she readily yielded any little gratification, which in the least interfered with the will of those about her: early taught the lesson of submissive obedience, the petulance of childhood was in her entirely checked. The danger that most threatened the temper of Julia was, that being so constantly repressed in the warmest feelings of pure affection, she should become too inanimate, and gradually lose that playful vivacity so engaging in one of her tender years. Conscious of the superior ascendency of Laura, her timid disposition shrunk from any idea of competition with her in the affection of her aunt: all emulation for improvement was thus imprudently checked, and

Julia was made to believe, as she advanced in years, that it would be a vain attempt for her to hope to excel, as she had neither the talents nor beauty of her sister Laura.

This mortifying assertion was too often repeated or insinuated by the visitors of Mrs. Denningham, to suffer Julia to remain ignorant of her aunt's unjust partiality, even had it escaped her own penetration. But this was not the case: she felt and owned the difference made between her and Laura; but, unwilling to attribute the slightest shadow of blame to those whom she so much loved, Julia wished to convince herself, that the real cause of Mrs. Denningham's superior fondness for Laura was on account of the difference of their ages: her sister, being three years older,

was, (Julia argued, and not without reason,) more of a companion to her aunt than she herself could hope to be. Tenderly attached to Mrs. Denningham, she allowed no reflections (in her hearing) to be cast on that kind friend against her weak indulgence of Laura's caprices, which every one remarked to themselves, and sometimes wished to intrude on the attention of Julia. Too generous to own the injustice of her aunt, she ever turned a deaf ear to the artful insinuations of servants and dependents, who sought to make her believe how much they pitied her situation, and lamented the blind partiality of her aunt. Dependents are ever quick in perceiving who is the favourite in the family; and they generally pay their court accordingly, frequently neglecting in the most shameful manner those

whom they think not so much esteemed. This was sometimes the case with poor Julia, notwithstanding the mild placidity of her manners, and the good-humoured affability with which she conducted herself. Others, pitying her orphan state, and really lamenting the difference made between the sisters, erred in the contrary way, by imprudently mentioning their observations to Julia herself, and thus unwittingly perhaps laying the foundation of jealousy and discontent, as would have been the case with many; but our little heroine, from her earliest years, evinced a disposition too amiable to be warped by such ill-judged remarks.

Mrs. Denningham had, during the many years the children had resided with her, spared no expense, no trouble,

in their improvement. The best masters had been engaged to render them accomplished and elegant in manners; nor was she disappointed in her hope of their equalling, if not excelling, their youthful competitors in modern acquirements of fashionable education. But so various had been the plans proposed and adopted by their aunt for this purpose, and so frequently had they been changed to give place to others recommended by her friends in London; that both Laura and Julia stood in some danger of being left in perfect ignorance of those essential branches of study, which form the mind, and lay the foundation for more solid improvement. Fortunately for them, they were rescued from the very imminent risk of becoming mere fashionable triflers, by the timely advice, and friendly interference, of a lady residing

in the immediate vicinity of Westcombe Priory, the country residence of Mrs. Denningham.

Mrs. Mordaunt had, by her amiable manners, greatly interested Mrs. Denningham in her favour; and in a short time gained such an influence with her, that she became the friend and confidant of our romantic visionary, to whom she frequently rendered the most essential service by her judicious advice, which, given in the mildest and most persuasive manner, the natural good sense of Mrs. Denningham could not always resist, and was never displeased at.

Mrs. Mordaunt was the widow of an officer of that name, who had greatly distinguished himself in his military

career, and at length fell in the service of his country, deeply lamented by his brother officers and a numerous circle of acquaintance. At his death, Mrs. Mordaunt finding her income very inconsiderable, she deemed it most prudent to retire from the scenes of high life, and with her young family to seek the shades of retirement.

Mrs. Denningham gladly availed herself of the advantage of having such a neighbour; and, by her polite and unremitting attentions to Mrs. Mordaunt, proved her own good sense and discrimination of character, unbiassed by the petty distinctions of wealth, and totally disregarding the opinion of many of her other acquaintance, who chanced to be more favoured by the gifts of fortune. Many of this epheme-

ral race, who valued themselves solely on their riches, wondered how Mrs. Denningham could be so absurd as to take any pleasure in the society of "such a quiet humdrum sort of being as Mrs. Mordaunt; who could not now afford to be one of the fashionable world, having little else but her pension as an officer's widow to maintain herself and children."

But all her fashionable acquaintance, it must be allowed, were not equally unfeeling; and in the day of adversity Mrs. Mordaunt had the consolation of more than one dear and valued friend, who had, unchanged by her present state of comparative poverty, remained firm to her interest, and greatly exerted themselves in her favour. Her son, the eldest of her children, was by their in-

terest placed, at the proper age, in the military school at —— ; and a promise was given that his advancement should be ensured as far as possible. This was a great relief to the anxiety of Mrs. Mordaunt; who, with unfeigned gratitude acknowledged the blessings which Providence had so mercifully bestowed on her and her destitute children, by thus granting them such friends as had both the will and the power to serve them in their utmost need, deprived as they now were of the protection of a father.

Jane, the second child of our amiable recluse, became the almost inseparable companion of Laura and Julia (during their residence in the country), but of the latter more especially. Their dispositions were more suitable, and Jane,

early in their acquaint...
the mild and affectionate m...
Julia to the hautêur and assuming
behaviour of Laura; who too often
seemed to value herself upon her own
pretensions to beauty and superficial
accomplishments; every where expecting that submission and deference to
her will, which her aunt had so blindly
indulged her in. Yet when she condescended to be agreeable, and to endeavour to please, none had the art of
winning admiration more decidedly than
Laura Denningham. With all the advantages of polished manners and an
uncommonly elegant person, she possessed the art of charming her companions by the sportive sallies of her
wit, and a playfulness peculiarly her
own: to those who had not long been
acquainted with her, she appeared the

and fascinating creature .ole. She knew how to control her temper, to conceal her foibles, when she sought to please: fond of admiration, and naturally vain, she spared no pains to attract the attention of her aunt's visitors; and yet in so artful a manner, as to appear perfectly unconscious of her power to please. Jane Mordaunt she wished to impress with the idea of her superior pretensions, and was greatly mortified that she could not succeed in exciting the envy of that amiable girl. Laura perceived too, that her sister Julia, whom she considered as nobody, was more esteemed than herself both by Mrs. Mordaunt and her daughter; who were both too impartial in their opinions, not to observe the different dispositions of the sisters. They lamented the folly of Mrs. Denningham,

who, unconscious of the real mischief she was doing to the interests of her darling niece, suffered herself to be guided by every whim and caprice of Laura, to the injury of her disposition and future happiness.

The society of Mrs. Mordaunt and her daughter were of the greatest advantage to Julia. With them she gradually acquired that degree of courage and self-possession, which had been so much repressed by the tyranny and unkindness of Laura: she began to feel, that, by application, she too might acquire those accomplishments, for which her sister had been so much praised by her aunt; that, in fact, she was not herself deficient in capacity to learn, as she had been led to imagine, and which had early checked her hope to excel.

The discriminating praises of Mrs. Mordaunt encouraged the timid spirit of our young heroine: she soon improved rapidly under the friendly guidance of her amiable preceptress, for as such Julia ever gratefully acknowledged Mrs. Mordaunt.

In their morning avocations at the cottage, Julia and Miss Mordaunt equally shared her attention: she directed their employments, and selected such books for their perusal, as she thought would add most to their information and amusement.

Both the young people, happy in her society, owned that these were the happiest hours of their lives; and with the deepest regret it was that Julia found herself obliged to give up this

pleasure, to return to London each succeeding winter. Perceiving this, and willing to gratify her niece, Mrs. Denningham begged Mrs. Mordaunt would allow her daughter to accompany the young people for a few months: but this request her friend would not admit of; not from any selfish dislike to part with Jane for a short time, but from a fear that the gaiety and splendour of a town life would give her beloved child a taste for those pleasures beyond her own situation in life, and probably make her feel more sensibly the deprivations she must submit to on her return.

The prudence of this argument Mrs. Denningham could not doubt; and as Laura did not make it a point to have Jane Mordaunt with them, the proposal

was not again urged.—Julia could not conceal her disappointment, and almost with tears entreated Mrs. Mordaunt to change her resolution: Jane's eloquent eyes spoke the same wish, but all to no purpose; and at length, perceiving her mother was firm on this subject, she would not pain her by appearing disappointed: yet the disappointment was certainly very great at her age, and this Mrs. Mordaunt was sensible of; but the future welfare of her child demanded this sacrifice; in kindness to her she therefore persisted in refusing to give her consent to the visit to London.

CHAPTER III.

At this time Laura was eighteen, and impatiently expected the proposed return to London, as it winter she was to be introduced (in other words, she was to come out that season). To this happy period she had long looked forward with eager impatience, not doubting that she should soon attract a crowd of admirers; nor was her aunt less sanguine in her expectations. She hoped her niece would then be the admiration of all their acquaintance in town; and though she dreaded to part with her favourite, yet she secretly hoped that Laura might form some splendid alliance, and thus fulfil her most flattering hopes.

Of Julia (being yet but a child in her opinion), Mrs. Denningham had not considered. For her she had laid no plans; as yet Charles and Laura had alone engrossed her attention. The former being now at the university, was very seldom with his aunt and sisters, but intended this winter to join their party in London. This long looked for interview Julia, in particular, anticipated with delight; nothing but this could compensate for her disappointment in not being allowed to take her friend Jane Mordaunt with her to town.

Charles Denningham, now nearly twenty, had left his former tutor Mr. Morland for two years, during which time he had been a perfect stranger at the Priory. Neither Mrs. Denningham nor his sisters had seen him, from his

having spent the vacations at the residence of his guardian, sir George Alvington, who knowing Charles had the prospect of a good fortune after the death of his aunt, wished to engage him to one of his own daughters, who would inherit but very slender portions. The match he considered would be advantageous, and the worldly-minded father had long resolved, that either Miss Honoria, or her accomplished sister Georgina, should become the wife of his ward.

This determination was not known to Mrs. Denningham, or she would not have wished her nephew to accept the invitations of his guardian. Ignorant of his motives, she attributed the seeming interest sir George felt for Charles to his former friendship for her brother the late Mr. Denningham, of whom she

had frequently heard him speak with the highest encomiums on his many virtues and amiable qualifications.

On their arrival in town, Laura was received by the Miss Alvingtons with more than usual complaisance: at the instigation of their father, they had adopted this sure method of winning her over to their views respecting Charles; and hoped, by flattering her, they should secure the good will of Mrs. Denningham.

It may not be here amiss to introduce my readers to the family of the Alvingtons, whom, it will be found, we shall have occasion to mention frequently in this little narrative.

Sir George Alvington had once been

the owner of a very considerable property; but, from his own extravagance and that of his lady, it was latterly so much impaired, that, to keep up the appearance he deemed necessary for a man of his rank, he was under the necessity of living up to the very extent of his income; the greatest part of which, from his having no son, would, at his death, devolve with the title to a distant relation, with whom sir George was not on the most amicable terms.

Sir George Alvington was elegant in person, and pleasing in his manners. Though now past the meridian of life, he had the art of rendering himself an agreeable acquisition to whatever company he was introduced. This pleasing suavity of address, and the seemingly generous sincerity of his heart, first

gained him the esteem of the late Mr. Denningham; and it was not known, till long after the death of that gentleman, that the circumstances of sir George were so deeply involved, or the father of Charles would never have selected him for the guardian of his son.

Lady Alvington was, like many of a certain class of fashionables, a finished manœuvrer. She had herself gained an establishment of her own by little arts, practised solely to attract the attentions of sir George, who, then a rich young baronet, was a prize worth trying for. She had succeeded to the utmost of her wishes; and had, as lady Alvington, contributed not a little toward lessening his fortune. She married him merly from the wish to outvie her com-

panions in dress and expense of every kind; it could not therefore be expected she would study his interest, in preference to gratifying her own passion for ostentatious display.

Honoria and Georgina Alvington were highly accomplished, and rather what might be termed showy-looking girls, than strictly handsome. Complete dashers in manners and dress, they were ever in the extreme of the mode. Theirs was not the down-cast eye of modest beauty, shrinking from the ardent gaze of admiration: they too evidently sought to attract attention; and were, besides, too conscious of their own superficial acquirements: yet, to suit their own purposes, they could assume the appearance of a simplicity not natural to them, and affect the most

scrupulous propriety of conduct. Tutored by their mother (an adept in all these petty artifices), the Miss Alvingtons hoped, by their or her address, to ensure themselves an alliance in some family of fortune or high rank: now in the very bloom of youth and beauty, they doubted not of making conquests worthy of their hopes.

Such was the family to which Charles Denningham had been introduced at the early age of nineteen. Ignorant of the world, at least of that part of it which resembled the Alvingtons, he could not be aware of the art and duplicity of those he was to associate with. Under the care of Mr. Morland, he had lived in comparative seclusion; but, in the company of such an amiable friend and able preceptor, retirement had not

been irksome: his hours had been spent in literary research, or recreations that would unbend the mind from study, and yet not lessen his eager desire for mental improvement.

Mr. Morland had, during his stay at the vicarage, won the esteem and confidence of his pupil. The influence gained in the boyish days of Charles Denningham was not afterwards lessened by absence: at the university, he continued to correspond with his former tutor, as his friend and adviser; in any difficulty, the worthy Morland was consulted, with implicit reliance on the justice of his opinion. That amiable man had known but little of the world for many years; he had not lately mixed in what is termed the circles of high life; but in his retirement he had heard enough of

the Alvingtons, to convince him that their acquaintance was by no means a desirable acquisition to his young friend; yet, he had so firm a reliance on the probity and natural candour of Charles Denningham, that he hoped the best. His pupil, he thought, would not easily be misled into the habits of folly and extravagance which he had been taught to shun with the utmost vigilance.

Nor was Charles alone the only member of the Denningham family for whom Mr. Morland entertained more than common regard; the interesting Julia shared the good man's unbounded esteem. He had perceived with regret, (during his frequent visits at the Priory,) the unjust partiality of Mrs. Denningham. He could not avoid observing, that Laura was daily being injured by

her aunt's misguided conduct, while the real merits of Julia were altogether disregarded. Pleased with the mild, forgiving disposition of our heroine, he had endeavoured to place her on an equality with her sister in the estimation of Mrs. Denningham, by convincing her that she would, with proper encouragement, be equally clever with Laura, but that being continually repressed in her endeavours to excel, she had become too diffident of her own abilities.

Mrs. Denningham, notwithstanding these well-meant and just remonstrances, could not be persuaded that she was herself unjust in her extreme fondness for her elder niece. Julia, she would say, as she did to Mrs. Mordaunt had nothing to complain of, for no

material difference was made between her and Laura; and there the matter rested.

Mrs. Denningham felt convinced, that Julia was an unusual favourite with Mr. Morland, and with their neighbours at the Cottage. This she was not surprised at; for, excepting the idol of her heart, Laura, "she was the most amiable being in the world: she was sure she loved Julia too much to neglect her; but the dear child must learn to submit to her elder sister in some things—it was but right she should do so, though, at the same time, to be treated with affection." After these reflections, the good old lady would, perhaps, check Laura for a day or two, in any little act of injustice towards her sister; but, as nothing could make a

lasting impression on her own versatile mind, even at her advanced age, the new resolution of reform did not last for a longer period; and poor Julia again fell into insignificance.

Laura, on her introduction into fashionable life, attracted all the admiration which even the most sanguine expectations of her aunt could hope. At the play, at the ball, or in the polite throngs of private parties, the beautiful Laura Denningham was extolled for her superior charms of beauty and elegance; nor was the very considerable fortune she was likely to have from her aunt's liberality one of the least attractive of her charms. With respect to her pretensions to beauty, many differed; but all agreed in the estimation of her fortune, that it was an indisputable advan-

tage. The ladies were, indeed, heard to say, that "her features were not regular, and that hers was not a style of beauty that would last; and, as to her fortune, that, being derived from the West Indies, was by no means to be depended on." This latter remark some of the most selfish and calculating of her admirers were not backward in agreeing to; but the generality of the young men of fashion swore she was divine, "a most lovely creature!" Some of the bucks extolled her air and manners; others admired her brilliant eyes and the enchanting dimples that played round her beautiful mouth: many admired her playful wit and high spirit, which gave a dignity to her whole deportment; but nearly as many dissented from this latter opinion, and were heard to say, "that it was but too probable,

if once seriously displeased or thwarted, that very spirit, now so much admired, might transform the beautiful smiling Laura into a perfect virago: impatient as she was of control, hers was not a temper they should choose for a wife."

Among the most ardent of her admirers were, the Honourable Mr. Leslie, sir Carroll O'Neal, an Irish baronet, and captain Kinmore. These three competitors for her favour were her most constant attendants in public, each, from very different motives, anxious to secure the prize, for which so many would envy them.

Mr. Leslie, the most worthy, and not the least favoured by Laura, was, from being a younger brother, not in very affluent circumstances, consider-

ing his rank in life. His greatest expectations with regard to fortune were from the promises of a rich uncle, who had declared it his intention, to leave the greatest part of his immense wealth to Mr. Leslie. This, being but a precarious dependence, the latter very honourably stated to Mrs. Denningham, when he made known to her his attachment to her niece.

Laura had, on their first acquaintance, certainly encouraged the addresses of Mr. Leslie, not from having duly estimated his many amiable qualities, but from the circumstance of his being likely to inherit the title of his elder brother, the latter having no son. The prospect of becoming lady Ormond, was too flattering to the vanity of Laura Denningham, to be rejected in haste.

She was, for this, willing to overlook any deficiency with regard to fortune, for the present, at least; for her aunt, she knew, would bestow sufficient on her to provide for them both, suitably to their rank, till after the death of the old uncle, whose riches would then devolve to his nephew.

Mrs. Denningham had long admired the character of Mr. Leslie, and of all the suitors for the fair hand of her niece she gave him the most decided preference; nor was *she* altogether insensible to the advantages of rank offered in this union of Laura with the next heir to the title of Ormond. The good old lady again fell into her former reveries; in all of which, the aggrandizement of her favourite Laura and her intended husband was the leading object: she

flattered herself, that no obstacle could prevent the expected marriage. But Mrs. Denningham was, as on many former occasions, doomed to be disappointed in this scheme. She had not taken into consideration the versatile, capricious disposition of her niece, who suddenly, from some slight pique, became cool and distant to Mr. Leslie; and just when her aunt had hoped she would come to some final arrangement relative to her marriage, Laura astonished her by declaring, that she never would become Mrs. Leslie, but, on the contrary, she had half made up her mind to accept sir Carroll O'Neal.

"Sir Carroll O'Neal!" exclaimed Mrs. Denningham. "Laura, is it possible you can be so unthinking, so unprincipled? You have encouraged Leslie, and yet

you tell me you prefer his rival. Child, you have used that amiable young man most shamefully by this capricious trifling, of which I thought you incapable!"

Laura made no reply; and her aunt still hoping to win her over to her former engagement with Leslie, she continued, "Dear Laura, is it possible you can be so blind to your own interest, as to prefer an Irish baronet to the presumptive heir to an earldom?"

"Dear aunt, I have told you what I mean to do: I shall certainly accept sir Carroll; he is such a dear, charming creature—all life and gaiety, quite outdashes Mr. Leslie, who is too good and too steady for me. So, aunt, you see you must now give up all hopes of my

being lady Ormond; it canna, winna, munna be," said she laughingly, quoting the words of an old Scotch song, and humming them over carelessly to the tune of the ballad. She evidently enjoyed the dismay and utter amazement depicted on the countenance of Mrs. Denningham.

"I am really shocked, Laura," said the latter, "at the levity with which you treat this important subject. Besides, I had planned every thing so well for you and Leslie:—the Priory was to have been fitted up for you both for my life, and Julia and I would have been content with the cottage in the park. I had laid out all the intended improvements: and then to have seen you some future time lady Ormond, (if you had been happy, my child,) would have been all I could

have wished," said the poor old lady, grieved to find she had planned so much in vain.

"Dear aunt," said Laura, "instead of preparing the Priory, I think you have, as usual, been building castles in the air. But suppose I should be lady O'Neal, instead of lady Ormond; will not that *sound* quite as well? To be sure, sir Carroll is only a baronet, an Irish baronet, with fifteen hundred a year, and a park. But you look as grave as if I were going to wed sir Gawen, or some other grim knight of the woful countenance."

At this moment the Miss Alvingtons were announced; and the lively chit-chat of these and other morning visitors dispelled the gloom, which had begun to

settle on the brow of Mrs. Denningham. She felt hurt at the want of confidence which Laura had evinced towards her; for, upon further inquiry, her aunt found she had actually rejected Mr. Leslie, and as decidedly accepted sir Carroll, without once consulting her on the subject. She too well knew the temper of her niece, to hope that any thing she could now urge, to entreat her to be more considerate, would be of any avail. Self-willed and hasty as even *she* was compelled to allow Laura to be, Mrs. Denningham knew, that, if she attempted to oppose her inclinations, it would only render her niece more peremptory in her determination. She sighed, as she called to mind the mild obedience of Julia: "she would not turn a deaf ear to my advice," said she, mentally.

Sir Carroll O'Neal, the cause of her present disquiet, was an Irish baronet, once of good fortune; but latterly, from a continual run of ill luck at the gaming-table, his income was considerably lessened. Thoughtless, good-natured in the extreme, he was an easy dupe to those who were less scrupulous than himself in notions of honour. He was, by many of his acquaintance, accused of having an eye to Miss Denningham's fortune, rather than a real attachment to herself; but this accusation was as unfounded as ungenerous, for he really preferred Laura to every other female of his acquaintance. Her vivacity and high spirit had delighted him; and in his devotion to his fair mistress, he never once staid to consider what fortune she would have: had Laura been pennyless, he would have declared himself her en-

thusiastic admirer, and most devoted lover.

Unlike his intimate friend and companion, captain Kinmore, sir Carroll was only too generous and unsuspicious: fervent in his attachments, he was a firm friend and ardent lover. And yet, with such a noble disposition, no prudent mother or guardian could wish their daughter or ward to become his wife: inevitable ruin, and all the horrors of poverty, were the almost certain consequences of a union with this thoughtless though amiable young man.

It was this belief that so strongly biassed the judgment of Mrs. Denningham against the match, even more than the demolition of all her favourite projects, when she so deeply regretted the impru-

dent choice, which her niece had determined on. In vain she attempted, with the assistance of Charles Denningham, to dissuade Laura from becoming lady O'Neal, even if she intended to think no more of Leslie. But she was deaf to their remonstrances; and Mrs. Denningham was, at length, reluctantly drawn in to give her consent to what she could not be brought to approve. The ensuing morning, sir Carroll was received as the accepted lover of her niece; and soon after the day was named, when Laura's fate was to be decided past all recall, and she was to become the bride of the happy sir Carroll.

Julia, being three years younger than her sister, was considered too much of a child to take any interest in what was about to take place; at the early age of

fifteen, it was not likely she should have much care for the future. Believing, as she did, that Laura could not fail in being happy, now she had gained her aunt's consent to have the man of her choice, Julia rejoiced with sincere delight at the flattering prospects of her sister: tenderly attached to Laura, she lamented only the certainty of their separation, which must take place so soon.

Unkind as Laura had been, yet the forgiving and affectionate Julia could not but regret losing her sister, perhaps for a great length of time; and the idea of her residing constantly in Ireland seemed at first too melancholy to be thought of. Her greatest consolation amid these sombre reflections was the hope of retaining Jane Mordaunt in the

neighbourhood of the Priory. She had been her first, her earliest friend: two years older than our heroine, Miss Mordaunt had been her confidante and adviser, from the time of their first acquaintance: with her and Mrs. Mordaunt's instructions, she had followed that line of duty, which had so importantly tended to her improvement and happiness.

Contrasted with the manners of the Miss Alvingtons, the sweetness and simplicity of Jane Mordaunt rose still higher in the estimation of Julia; nor was she the only person, who drew a comparison between these trifling insipid beings and the unaffected unobtrusive daughter of Mrs. Mordaunt.

Charles Denningham too plainly saw

through the shallow devices of sir George Alvington and his two daughters, to be for a moment flattered by the very particular attentions he received from either. The father he knew to be a perfect man of the world; and the daughters were too vain and trifling to please even so young a man as Charles Denningham, if he had the least discrimination of character. Charles was not deficient in discernment: he saw that Honoria, the eldest of the Miss Alvingtons, was a mere sentimental fine lady, who had so filled her head with German plays and French romances, that she could scarcely condescend to give a thought to any thing but love and sentimental friendship of the most extravagant kind; not unfrequently to the great amusement of her numerous acquaintance.

Georgina, the second daughter, laid claim to being a wit, and fancied that the pert flippancy of her replies were received with universal applause; while, in fact, she was the jest of all who knew her. The very reverse of the languor and affectation of her sentimental sister, she tormented every one with her excessive volubility and overstrained vivacity: it was difficult to say which she excited most, the mirth or the contempt of her companions.

Lady Alvington throught them truly irresistible, and was perfectly astonished that Charles Denningham was not quite smitten with one or other of her accomplished daughters. She excused him, at first, on account of his extreme youth; but this could now no longer be urged as a reason for his indifference: and lady

Alvington was secretly much mortified that her plan had not succeeded; this her pride would not allow her to acknowledge openly.

"He is but a school-boy yet," said she to sir George, at one of their private conferences on the subject; "he is but lately escaped from the jurisdiction of that moping old book-worm Morland," added her ladyship with contemptuous petulance.

"Very true," replied sir George; "but I could have wished him, young as he is, to have made choice of one of the girls, or we may lose him yet: the boy may see some country Miss at the Priory, who will succeed in gaining him, though Honoria and Georgina have failed."

"Impossible!" exclaimed his lady with great vehemence: "you pay the Miss Alvingtons a high compliment indeed, to imagine for a moment that an ignorant country girl can ever rival my daughters, distinguished as they are for their beauty and accomplishments."

"Well, my love, I did not mean to slight the dear girls," replied sir George. "If the young fellow saw with my eyes, he would prefer them to any other beings on the face of the globe; but another winter may be more successful; perhaps, too, the girls may be invited by that old quiz, Mrs. Denningham, to return to the Priory with her nieces; if so, I shall still hope the best," added he; and thus ended the consultation.

CHAPTER IV.

The Miss Alvingtons, instructed by their very prudent mamma, so completely ingratiated themselves into the favour of Laura, that she insisted upon their returning with her to Westcombe. This was precisely what they both wished; but, in order to enhance the favour of their company to their young friend, they just then unfortunately called to mind several engagements they had already made among their acquaintance. Laura, as they expected, became the more resolute in her determination, that they should give her the preference, and go immediately to the Priory. After

much seeming debate, the young ladies at length consented. Honoria declared it was impossible to refuse her fair friend any thing.

"Dear, lovely Laura," said she, with an affected sigh; "I cannot renounce the pleasure of your valued society; I cannot *exist* without *you*, sweet fascinating girl! What would the whole world be without a friend? where could I then look for a congenial soul? Friendship, such as ours, is the bliss of life!" added the romantic girl, with all the silly airs of sentimental heroism.

"What will you do when I am in Ireland?" inquired Laura, with her usual archness.

"Oh! the kind zephyrs will waft her

sighs over to the emerald isle," said Georgina.

"But dear Honour, bright and fair, here's the Captain debonair; will not he console you, think you, in the absence of Miss Denningham?"

This was said in such a half ironical half playful manner, that Laura could not avoid joining in the laugh at the expense of Honoria; and declaring that captain Kinmore might, she thought, well supply the place of the *congenial soul* Miss Alvington had been so long seeking. This retort rather nettled the young lady; for she was conscious she had flirted very much of late with the dashing Hibernian; but not with any decided preference for him, but merely because he knew how to compliment

her in her own style. This, it is certain, he did but for his own amusement, and that of his brother officers; who jestingly observed, "that Kinmore had proved how easy it was to obtain the distinctions of *Honour*, however perverse that purblind dame Fortune had hitherto been to his wishes."

At the moment captain Kinmore and Charles Denningham appeared, the two sisters had unfortunately thrown aside their company voices; and were sharply engaged in a dispute, which had so completely thrown them off their guard, that neither was conscious of the approach of the gentlemen. Laura, all the time, was laughing heartily at the pet they were in about such a trifle, as had been the original cause of their altercation.

On entering the drawing-room, the first glance convinced the intruders, that their presence was at that instant quite *mal-à-propos*; yet they had advanced too far to retreat. Unwilling as they were to be spectators of this little fracas, they were in a manner forced into it: both sisters began in one breath vehemently accusing each other of "envy, malice, and all uncharitableness." It was with the utmost difficulty, that the united efforts of both gentlemen could pacify the anger of the enraged disputants; each declared the other was to blame, and neither was willing to conciliate. The languishing eyes of Honoria now sparkled with rage, her whole frame trembled with passion; while her sister, with provoking malice, cast the most ironical and cutting reflections on the conduct of the sentimental Honoria,

whose present manner she purposely contrasted with her usual affectation of mild benevolence and sweet timidity.

Laura, in spite of her mirth at their expense, felt almost ashamed of their violence and want of decorum.

Charles, who had never before witnessed such a scene, stood utterly confounded; but Kinmore, with more address and presence of mind, by indirect compliments to both ladies succeeded in soothing their irritable tempers, and began again to converse with Honoria in his accustomed style of bombast; which, from the very amiable motive of mortifying her sister, she now encouraged more than ever. She gradually resumed her airs of languid sensibility; and was once more, as if by magic, the

very soul of sentiment. Reclining gracefully on one of the superb couches, she took up a volume of Zimmerman on Solitude. "Charming idea, how lovely is solitude!" she exclaimed in a soft melodious accent.

"Not very polite to the present company," said her sister, in something of her late acrimonious tone of voice.

"But does not the same author remark, that even in the most delightful solitude he still felt a wish for some dear object, to *whom* he could say, 'How lovely is solitude?'" said Charles Denningham.

"You are right, Charles," observed Laura; "he no doubt wished for a *congenial soul*," said she, casting a playful

mischievous glance at Honoria, which was not lost on Kinmore. He guessed it was an allusion to a former remark of Honoria or her sister, more likely the former. "Perhaps some one dearer than a friend, a lover!" said Kinmore, throwing himself on his knees, and snatching the fair hand of Miss Alvington with impassioned ardour, which he pressed to his lips; "with a lover perhaps you would condescend to exclaim, 'How charming is solitude!' Lovely Honoria, with thee the most frightful solitude would be to me a Paradise!"

All joined in the laugh against the blushing simpering heroine, who, for a time, pretended to be quite embarrassed by the high-flown speech of the gallant captain; but at length perceiving she was the object of ridicule to all present,

instead of envy and admiration, as she had before flattered herself, she started from the couch, and exclaimed with a tragedy air, "There is no true love, but love divine!"

This was too ridiculous: even Charles Denningham, (though provoked and disgusted at her folly,) could not repress his laughter; and Miss Alvington, casting one of her most indignant glances at the whole party, left them to enjoy their mirth uncontrolled.

Georgina maliciously enjoyed the evident mortification of her sister; and pleased herself with the idea, that she should now wholly engross the attention of both gentlemen to her own bon-mots and fancied witticisms. For Laura, being already engaged, could not be displeased

at her attracting the admiration of captain Kinmore, if Charles Denningham should continue indifferent.

Both gentlemen were to accompany their party to Westcombe-Priory; and Miss Georgina thought it advisable, like many other young ladies, "to keep two strings to her bow," as she expressed herself. But we will now, if the reader please, return to the worthy Mrs. Denningham and her nieces, whom we left on the point of quitting town to return to the Priory. Previous to their departure, it was necessary to call on their several friends to take leave of them. During these visits, Julia found ample field for amusement; and sometimes, though but rarely, of improvement. Laura, (engaged as she was with younger, and, as she thought, more

agreeable companions than most of her aunt's friends,) would not always be of the party, but prevailed on her and Julia to make her excuses.

It may be remembered, at the time when Mrs. Denningham was first introduced to the reader, she had formed an acquaintance with a certain learned *coterie*, a kind of *Bas Bleu* society. Now, though Mrs. Denningham had certainly given up all literary competition of late years, yet she had not renounced the acquaintance of her learned friends; she still occasionally was of their parties, and not unfrequently adopted some of her favourite schemes from new opinions they had started in her hearing.

Among this circle of friends, Mrs. Oldbury was a standing favourite; every

thing that she did or said was sure to be approved by our visionary.

Lady Blandish, with the noted Chinese characters, had long since retired from this vain world, and its still vainer pursuits, "[redacted]" and to that world, where the virtues of a Christian character alone could be of any service to her ladyship.

Many others of Mrs. Denningham's early friends had in a similar manner disappeared "from life's busy stage." But one aged spinster yet remained, who had been the first member of the learned society before alluded to: she seemed, by her vehemence of utterance and extreme volubility, to have kept even old Time himself at bay; as *she*

had for nearly half a century every male human being of her acquaintance. From her ladyship's dashing nephew, to the very footman who was perforce obliged to wait on her, all dreaded alike the sound of her not very mellifluous voice. Having lately, to the relief of her friends, been wholly engrossed by the study of craniology, she very charitably laid down the rule, that people were either good or bad according to the appearance of their sculls. She had studied, and studied so long, that she at length gave implicit credence to the fanciful system broached by the learned Spurzheim, and others of his peculiar way of reasoning. It must be owned, that in feeling over the protuberances of her own scull, lady Ann had flattered herself, that hers alone was of the most amiable and desirable construction. Proud of this

fancied superiority, she was never so well pleased as when discussing the subject of craniology; and was sure to end by wishing to feel the sculls of all her different visitors, whom she could possibly persuade to suffer their heads to be submitted to her judgment.

Another lady of the same *coterie* was distinguished for her studies in various branches of natural history; and besides had such a passion for the dawning arts of the savage nations, that she actually sent to America to purchase a piece of cloth made of the bark of some tree, the peculiar growth of that country. With this she received a fine specimen of matting, woven with great ingenuity from the long grass by the inhabitants of the South Sea Islands. This Mrs. Paterson declared to be inimitable,

both for use and beauty. She said, "she greatly preferred it to carpets, and was resolved to have the whole of her country-house furnished with this new and ingenious manufacture, in place of the costly carpets, which had, till now, decorated her apartments at the villa of Beaulieu. Mrs. Paterson staid not to consider how this singular substitute would correspond with the magnificence and splendour which the other furniture exhibited: it was a novel idea; no one but herself had planned it; and that one reason was, in itself, all-sufficient. The next consideration was, where should she get it manufactured, even if a similar kind of grass could be obtained: in this dilemma, Mrs. Paterson determined to consult "her dear friend Mrs. Denningham," before she left town. Accordingly, when that lady did call, she

was entertained with a long detail of the superior advantages of matting over carpets, which Mrs. Paterson declared to be enervating in the extreme.

"But would not India matting be equal to that from the South Sea Islands?" inquired Mrs. Denningham. "The former is to be had, and is sometimes used in this country; I think you will find great difficulty in procuring the latter, at least sufficient for your purpose."

"I detest the India matting, and I am certain it has not half the advantages of my beautiful specimen," replied the lady: "I wish to have a manufactory established in this country, for this particular kind. I wish Mr. Paterson would allow me to set up one in our village,

near Beaulieu: it would be an excellent method of employing the poor; besides, they could weave hammocks for their children, the same as you, no doubt, have seen in the British Museum; much better for them than sleeping on those heaps of filth and rags they call beds."

Here Mrs. Paterson was obliged to stop to take breath; and Mrs. Denningham said, (as if struck with some sudden thought,) "And you really think it would be to their advantage if we could succeed in establishing your plan: I should like to try, if I could be certain of benefitting the poor by it."

"My dearest friend, you quite delight me; you are positively the only enterprising character I know. I make no

manner of doubt of its succeeding; you must set about it immediately: I will consult Dr. W—— what kind of grass should be cultivated for our purpose: I know he can advise us, and will be happy to forward any new plan; it is what he delights in. You shall have my beautiful specimen of matting, and the curious hammock; they will both serve your people as patterns."

"I am determined to try what can be done," rejoined Mrs. Denningham; "since it may serve, at all events, to employ the poor children, and so far will do good. I shall set about it immediately on my return; as soon, at least, as we have found what grass will do the best. And I must engage one or two experienced weavers to examine the web you intend to lend me; these, and

spinners, must be had to instruct the children. But may I not beg the favour of seeing these valuable curiosities? I mean the hammock and matting, which I have not yet seen."

"Oh! by all means; what could I possibly be thinking of, not to show you them before? Shall I trouble you to go with me to the nursery, you will then see the hammock in perfection. I had Mr. B—— of the L—— Museum here this morning, to consult with him how it should be slung, that I might have it precisely like those used by the South Sea Islanders." Saying this, she instantly led the way to the children's apartments; she threw open the door of the sleeping room, and, to the utter amazement of Mrs. Denningham, (and Julia, who had been an attentive ob-

server of all that had passed,) they beheld two infants asleep in the hammock before mentioned. This was slung at least eight or ten feet from the floor, and across the middle of the room, suspended from the ceiling: the apartment being exceeding lofty and spacious, it really appeared frightful to behold two such young children so imprudently exposed to the danger that threatened them, of being, by any inadvertency in drawing up the cord of the hammock, thrown out from such a height; the probable consequences of which were too dreadful to think of.

"There!" said Mrs. Paterson exultingly, "is not that singular? is not that simplicity itself? primitive simplicity, no fine complicated machinery, no encumbrance of bedstead. This hammock

folds up, or is suspended as you now see it: that is precisely the method of the natives of Owhyhee, or Otaheite!"

"But I should fear some accident to the children: are they quite safe, do you think, drawn up to such a tremendous height as they now are? I must own," said Mrs. Denningham, "that Julia and I are alarmed for their safety, dear little creatures! I should fear that slight cord of dried grass alone was not sufficiently strong to bear them."

"You are deceived altogether, I assure you;" replied the mother of the poor babes: "that hammock would support the weight of a man six feet in height; but I cannot persuade nurse of this," said she, smiling at what she called the vain fears of her attendant.

"No, madam, I can't say I like such new-fangled ways; why should we follow the ways of a parcel of wild _selviges_, who never knew the comfort of a bed in all their lives? The dear children will surely be killed; if, madam, you do mean to keep using this outlandish vagary: for my part, I can hardly sit by and see the dear innocents hoisted up like in a great cabbage net, all hanging as it were on nothing."

Here the old woman, (who had been an attendant in the family for many years, and was moreover rather a favourite with her lady,) began to entreat she would let the infants once more "sleep in a bed fit for a Christian;" meaning a human being, in which sense the word Christian is fre-

quently used incorrectly by the lower classes.

"No, Dalling, no, I cannot give up my plans; Christian or Pagan, the children shall sleep there. I am sure they are very comfortable; but before we go, let us just have a peep at the dear little animals."

Dalling, grumbling and discontented, began to loosen the very slender cord that fastened the hammock. This had by some means become entangled in being drawn up; and the moment she attempted to unfasten it and lower the hammock, from its twisted state it began twirling round and round, in a way very similar to that of a machine called a bottle-jack, which, when wound up,

continues going round for a certain interval. By this extraordinary action of the rope it broke; but fortunately not before the children had nearly reached the ground in their strange sort of couch. Julia, almost dead with terror, rushed forward, and, by the assistance of Dalling, caught the hammock just before it touched the boards. The infants, awakened by the velocity and singular mode of their descent, looked wildly around; terrified as they were, they had no sooner recovered their breath, than they immediately set up such a scream, as to make the lofty chamber re-echo with their piercing cries: it was with the utmost difficulty, that the nurse and the tender-hearted Julia could possibly succeed in quieting them.

Alarmed at the accident, and almost

stunned at the noise. Mrs. Denningham, having assured herself that the children were not in reality hurt, was glad to retreat from this scene of confusion; but before she left Mrs. Paterson, she earnestly entreated her not to risk the safety of her little ones by placing them again in the hammock. Her friend, who was a very tender mother, for this once consented to follow the dictates of prudence and good sense, in preference to the wild chimeras of her own imagination.

"But the mats, my dear Mrs. Denningham," said she; "you will not give up all thoughts of them surely! That cannot injure any one, and the plan will certainly be beneficial by employing the poor."

"I think it might," replied her friend, unwilling as well as herself to give up the newly suggested plan. "I will think of it, and let you know; but I think I must consult Mr. Morland about it before I decide."

After some trivial conversation on indifferent subjects, the ladies took their leave of Mrs. Paterson, and proceeded to the house of lady Ann Marvel. On being announced, they found her ladyship lost in deep contemplation; and, to the no small horror of Julia, she beheld a scull, marked with black lines in various directions, as dividing it into separate sections. Mrs. Denningham, accustomed to the singular pursuits of her ladyship, could not forbear smiling at the visible surprise of her niece.

Lady Ann started up as from a profound reverie, and with the most gracious air her meager countenance could assume, to receive her visitors.—" I was really so lost in thought, that I scarcely saw you approach. 'I beg ten thousand pardons, dear Mrs. Denningham; but I know you will excuse me, when I tell you, I have been studying the most interesting subject in creation. This scull has afforded me more amusement than you can imagine; I am quite enraptured with the art of studying a person's disposition by the formation of their sculls. For instance, I can tell the disposition of the man who once owned that scull on the table, as well as if he were here this moment: it is, indeed, a most entertaining study," said she, taking up the scull, and handling

it with the same easy nonchalance she would her snuff-box. She then pointed out the various bones, as classed by the most celebrated craniologists: "This is the organ of destructiveness, and that of constructiveness, and that of amativeness," said her ladyship. "See, the organ of destructiveness is in this subject uncommonly prominent; and to prove how true is this new system, I must tell you, that I know from authority, that this is the scull of a murderer, who was hung for the crime, and his body dissected. By great interest I was allowed the loan of it; for I greatly preferred studying a real scull, to any wooden painted semblance of one. I have overcome all prejudices, and care no more for handling this untenanted mansion of an ethereal soul, than I do for taking hold of my fan, or a box of

bons-bons. Here, child, take it, and look over the different lines I have drawn on it; it will perhaps amuse you," said her ladyship as she presented the scull to Julia; who, half fearful of offending lady Ann by her childish fears and prejudices, dared not openly refuse it, yet trembled with horror at the idea of taking hold of such a terrific object as the scull of a murderer. Trembling with fear, she had well nigh let it fall from her hands. Her aunt, happening that moment to observe her emotion, and that she looked uncommonly pale, felt for her distress, and kindly apologized for the weakness she evinced, in being unable to handle a scull with the same composure her ladyship did.

"But a girl of fifteen, you know, lady Ann, cannot be expected to act

with such fortitude and superior sense as one of your ladyship's talents."

This compliment brought a smile on the ghastly features of lady Ann, which made her look almost as frightful as the cause of poor Julia's alarm.

Two ladies were now announced; one a relation of her ladyship, a Mrs. Marvel; and the other a young lady of the name of Popplewell. After the usual salutations were over, the ladies entered into conversation with Mrs. Denningham and her niece on various subjects; but lady Ann, wholly engrossed by her favourite study, persisted in introducing craniology to the notice of her visitors. She read them a long catalogue of the remarks and notes on the different heads she had herself stu-

died; and concluded by modestly asserting, that none she had ever seen equalled her own for the good qualities it evidently indicated. She then ran on a long string of technical terms, to prove that her scull was cast in such a mould, as to endow her with every amiable and prudent disposition.

Miss Popplewell chose to appear rather sceptical, while her friend contented herself with expressing her astonishment.

Mrs. Denningham and Julia did not think proper to dispute the point in question, but could not repress the smile of incredulity. Probably this was perceived by lady Ann, and, with the more *apparent* scepticism of Miss Popplewell, served to irritate the tenacious

temper of her ladyship. Angry remarks and hints were thrown out by both ladies; argument succeeded argument, till both the disputants, forgetting the decorum of good breeding, flatly contradicted each other. It was in vain that Mrs. Denningham and Mrs. Marvel endeavoured to appease their anger, and to change the topic of conversation, which had, unhappily, produced so much altercation.

"Indeed, lady Ann," said Miss Popplewell, "I must say, I feel myself insulted by your remarks on the formation of my scull: I think them very illiberal. And, as to your own pretensions to all the cardinal virtues, I cannot believe you are entitled to that distinction: I think my own scull quite as well formed as your ladyship's. I can

easily imagine, you have in perfection the organ of *constructiveness*, and that of *destructiveness* too; if by that may be comprehended the wish to invent *accusations*, in the intention to destroy *reputations!*" Miss Popplewell here cast a look of malignant irony on lady Ann, which her ladyship as graciously retorted.

"Well, Miss Popplewell, I can bear with your temper, I hope; for those who *have* their sculls so unhappily distinguished as *yours* is, must be expected to be of a *warm temper*," said she, with an affected smirk, bridling up her stiff head and scraggy neck.

"Really, ma'am, this is too much; these ladies shall be my judge," said her opponent.

"I dare you to follow my example," said the exasperated lady, tearing off her bonnet, and entreating Mrs. Denningham to feel her head, and judge by the scull that stood near on the table, ready marked out for the study of craniology.

Lady Ann, in the height of her indignation, forgot that the jetty ringlets which adorned her brows were not the growth of her own pericranium, but purchased at her ladyship's hairdresser's. In displacing her head-dress, the borrowed curls fell to the ground. Not heeding this, (at any other time, *calamitous event*,) she bared her head for inspection. A few scattered locks of grizzle gray fell over her wrinkled brow; but the upper part of her head was so bald and bare, that it might have

served Spurzheim himself as a study,—a living subject for the exercise of his inventive faculties.

Advancing towards Miss Popplewell, lady Ann cast such a withering glance at that equally enraged damsel, that she retreated from the awful scowl, really terrified. She might well have exclaimed, "Shake not your *hoary* locks at me," for the frowns of her ladyship still pursued her, till, somewhat soothed by the conciliating manners of Mrs. Denningham and the entreaties of Mrs. Marvel, both ladies were prevailed on to be more calm, and to give up the point in debate.

Poor Julia, all this time silent from terror and astonishment, was delighted when her aunt proposed to take leave.

As soon as they had left the house, and she once more found herself safely seated in the carriage, she exclaimed, "Dear aunt, is it possible lady Ann can be in her right senses?—surely she cannot! Did you ever hear of such conduct?—I was really so frightened, I could not tell where I was; if you had not been with me, I should have run out of the house as I would out of Bedlam."

"My sweet girl," observed her aunt, "I can easily believe your alarm was great, at the very strange scene you have just witnessed. Lady Ann conducted herself exceedingly ill. I have, of late, been so much disgusted by her pertinacity and ill humour, I believe I shall drop her acquaintance."

Julia was greatly rejoiced at this intelligence, and, in better spirits, accompanied her aunt to Mrs. Oldbury's, another acquaintance of Mrs. Denningham's.

CHAPTER V.

When Mrs. Denningham and her niece arrived at Mrs. Oldbury's, Julia could not help remarking to herself that they seemed fated to meet with singular events this morning, for the first appearance of this lady was calculated to excite the surprise of the most inattentive observer: she was so completely disguised by an immense pair of green gogglers, that it was scarcely possible to recognise their old acquaintance. She advanced to receive them with all her accustomed cordiality, totally regardless of her singular appearance. As she moved from her seat, a piece of her gown (which had been

nearly torn off from the train) hung dangling over her shoe, with the needle and thread in it, which proved that she had intended to repair the fracture, however strange the method adopted of doing so while on her person. Unfortunately Fido, her pet lap-dog, perceived the fluttering fragment, and running hastily towards his mistress, he sprang upon it with such eagerness, that he set his little soft foot right on the point of the needle, which was left awkwardly sticking out of the work Mrs. Oldbury had been engaged with. A hideous yell was the consequence of poor Fido's disaster; and some moments after the arrival of the visitors were employed in soothing the irritated feelings of the little animal, who held up his wounded paw with the needle still sticking in it, and whined out his reproaches to his

mistress for her carelessness in leaving it in his way; and yet, so very ridiculous was the whole circumstance, that the party could not forbear smiling at the cause of his misfortune. Mrs. Oldbury, with perfect good humour, explained the reason of their having found her thus employed. Having, she said, studied optics, till she was nearly blind, she had determined to try how she could work with her gogglers on; and having just before rent the train of her dress by unluckily stepping her foot through it, she took that up as being work nearest at hand. Her friend politely assured her, that no apology was necessary to them, if she would pardon their intrusion; but, both our heroine and her aunt observed, that Mrs. Oldbury had, either from carelessness of appearance, or entire absence of mind,

begun to repair her dress with a piece of cotton of quite a different pattern and texture.

"Surely," thought Julia, "the Miss Alvingtons were justified in their assertion, that my aunt associates with "all the oddities in town," for so the young ladies had expressed themselves in her hearing. But, upon further acquaintance, she found much to admire, and still more to esteem, in the sentiments and manners of Mrs. Oldbury. Singular in her notions, she was not dictatorial or pedantic; on the contrary, so mild and affable, that her society was courted by all ranks and all ages. She knew how to amuse and trifle, with the most amiable condescension, though of such superior abilities as to entitle her to associate with the most eminent literary

characters. Our heroine had not been one hour in her company, before she regretted they must so soon be deprived of her society.

With such eminent talents as Mrs. Oldbury undoubtedly possessed, it was lamented by her real friends, that she did not conform (in dress and other little non-essentials) to the customs of the world in general. "Singularity," as Mrs. Mordaunt had often justly observed to her daughter and Julia, "is a foible in whomsoever it may be observed: it is frequently the *weakness* of a superior mind, but not the *proof* of strong intellect; it is decidedly never estimable, whether it spring from vanity, or carelessness of the opinion of the world." And such would have been her remark, had she been once in the company of

Mrs. Oldbury. This lady had, she said, been studying optics, and at last persuaded herself so much of the necessity of guarding the organ of vision from external injury, that she resolved to wear gogglers, which were then newly invented; and she, accordingly, for some time continued to wear them. She had not long been in the habit of wearing them when Mrs. Denningham called on her; the subject of optics was yet fresh in her mind, and she earnestly begged her friend would adopt the same plan for herself and nieces.

Julia laughed at the idea of one so young as she was wearing spectacles. Laura, she was certain, would soon laugh her aunt out of such a singular whim; indeed, to say the truth, she hoped her sister would not like her-

self to wear the frightful green goggles.

Before Mrs. Denningham went away, Mrs. Oldbury hinted a plan for the benefit of her school-children; which was, that each of them should have a pair of green glasses like her own, "in order," as she said, "to preserve their sight perfect to an advanced age; and this was the only method of doing so, by being careful of it when young."

This in itself was good advice; "But surely," thought her visitors, "there can be no necessity for encumbering children with artificial helps to the power of vision; their employments do not commonly tend to overstrain the optic nerves."

But Mrs. Oldbury, though too well bred to be positive on the subject, yet evidently was self-convinced of the utility of children's wearing green gogglers.

Mrs. Denningham's natural good sense taught her to consider the matter altogether as absurd in the extreme; but she did not positively *refuse* to adopt the plan.

After a long chit-chat on various other subjects, Julia and her aunt returned home quite wearied out, though quite amused, with their morning visits. The former had enough to relate to her sister, who joined heartily in the laugh which the recital of their peregrinations excited. Laura was in uncommonly good

humour with Julia, and, for a wonder, told her "she could be an amusing droll little creature when she liked, but never so much so as when laughing at the quizzical acquaintance of old aunty."

Our heroine did not much like this disrespectful style of language, when speaking of her aunt or her friends; though not daring to say this to Laura, she suffered it to pass unnoticed. But, in her secret thoughts, she lamented that her sister should be so much led away by the Miss Alvingtons, and others of her acquaintance, to despise those whom her aunt, her dearest friend, esteemed; especially Mrs. Oldbury, who had gained much in the estimation of Julia during her short visit. As to lady Ann and Miss Popplewell, they were not to be classed among the *friends*,

scarcely the *acquaintance*, of Mrs. Denningham; their follies she could therefore more freely laugh at.

The next day, the family of the Denninghams, accompanied by the Miss Alvingtons, sir Carroll O'Neal, and his friend captain Kinmore, set out for the Priory; and as nothing material occurred on the journey, the reader will excuse my hurrying them over the next two days, and will follow me to the account of their arrival at Westcombe.

It was a lovely morning in June when the carriage stopped at the lodge. Old Dorcas came out to greet her mistress and the young ladies, but looked at first amazed at what she styled "such a *mort* of fine company." Bustling in for the key of the great gates, she called for her

good man the old gardener, who next made his appearance, rather disconcerted at not being in his full dress; for none of the servants had expected the family would arrive so soon in the day.

"Well, Matthew, how goes on the garden? have you any flowers for us?" said Mrs. Denningham, addressing the old man with her wonted tone of good-natured affability.

Quite recovered from his embarrassment by the condescension of his respected mistress, Matthew smilingly replied, "O yes, ma'am, we have a power of *racclusses*, and *nunclusses* out of number; but some of the flowers and plants, madam, you sent us, that comed from across the seas, *they* be all dead: there was no help for it, my lady; but

then we have a glorious show of Grand Turks and Bath nosegays, with the finest *rhodydundrums* you ever beheld: and the finest blossoms on the fruit trees we had this spring; we shall have a main sight of fruit to pick from the old trees up yonder in the Prior's garden: there will be a fine show of peaches and nectarines, I do expect.'

Mrs. Denningham, thinking that the old man had by this time said his say, was about to order the man to drive on, but she was as soon checked in her intention; for Matthew, as if suddenly recollecting some sad disaster, again approached the carriage, and with a doleful countenance began again:

"Madam, I had like to have forgot to tell you of one misfortune."

"Well, what is the matter? nothing happened to any of the servants I hope," said his mistress, with some alarm, really disturbed by the solemnity of his manner.

"Why, madam, there are none of the servants hurt, thank God, they be all *pure;* but Adam has had his head blown off, and Eve has lost her arm and her hand that held the apple; but the great serpent is as flourishing as ever round the old tree. And then there is St. George and the dragon very well, but only the dragon lost his tail the last high winds; it stood up rather awkwardly always, to my mind."

Here honest Matthew was stopped in his lamentation by the ill-repressed laughter of the young ladies, who now

comprehended the nature of the misfortune he so deeply deplored. Julia had whispered to the Miss Alvingtons, that those same wounded and mighty paragons were no other than old yew trees, cut into grotesque figures; some meant to be like human forms, and designated as the gardener had informed them.

Mrs. Denningham could not forbear joining in the mirth of the youthful party, to the no small amazement of old Matthew, who stood as if doubting the evidence of his senses; for he had been, from his boyish days, accustomed to view these same antique figures,—these monuments of former times, with the most profound awe and veneration. Yet, not willing on this occasion to be the only sorrowful being in company, his hard features gradually relaxed into a

smile: he very composedly produced the ponderous keys of the lodge gates, and as deliberately set about opening the latter.

Matthew, the very reverse of his aged dame, was all steadiness and precision; nothing ever could put him out of his own precise way of proceeding. For this reason he had preferred having the care of the lodge, to making one of the establishment at the Priory; in which caprice Mrs. Denningham had indulged him, in consideration of the many years of faithful servitude he had spent in her family. Matthew still retained the situation of what he termed head gardener, having a boy to work under his directions; and Dorcas, his bustling honest dame, in like manner superintended the dairy. Both were firmly attached to

the interests of their mistress, from the affability and liberality she had evinced towards them and the rest of her domestics, during the many years they had been in her service.

As the carriages passed rapidly on through the old avenue that led to the Priory, the Miss Alvingtons, who had never before been at Westcombe, were each engaged in admiring the venerable structure.

"Oh delightful!" exclaimed Miss Honoria; "how charming this must be by moonlight! In this cool sequestered shade I could live for ever," said she, with her usual sentimental drawl of affectation.

"With a black veil and a rosary, you

would fancy yourself a second Heloise, no doubt," retorted her sister.

"O no, the fair Constantia would suit Honoria better," said Laura; "and Kinmore would make a most excellent Theodore. Your sister must have a father confessor," added she playfully; "cannot we, aunt, furnish poor Kinmore with a suitable dress from out of the old stores at the Priory?"

Honoria, unmindful, or feigning to be so, of the ridicule cast on her predilection for monastic seclusion, still continued soliloquising in the same strain of affected romance: "Oh! what a solemn stillness reigns around!" said she, with a deep sigh, as if she were indeed about to be sacrificed at the altar of superstition, instead of sharing with

her young companions in the gay delights of mirth and festivity.

Unfortunately for the lady's sentimental ejaculation, the great house-dog, at that instant hearing the approach of the carriage, set up such a tremendous howl and bark, as made even Miss Alvington herself for once forget her whining tone of sensibility, and exclaim, in her natural voice, "Good God, we shall all be torn to pieces by that frightful beast; why he is, I declare, more like a young lion than a dog: I hope he will not make a spring at us," said she, with real terror depicted on her countenance, which, this time at least, was true to nature in its expression.

"You need not be the least alarmed," said Julia, feeling for the distress of

Honoria: "I assure you he is as gentle as a lamb to any one of us; he will not attempt to hurt you." To prove the truth of this, she sprang out of the carriage the very moment the step was let down, and in an instant was by the side of her old favourite Leo, who, delighted to feel the gentle pat of her well-remembered hand, fawned and played all the frolicsome tricks of a kitten, which, with his bulky form and rude gestures, appeared truly ridiculous.

By thus suffering him to amuse himself, Julia succeeded in keeping Leo at a respectful distance from the carriage, while the rest of the party alighted. But unluckily for the timid fears of Honoria, the poor faithful creature, chancing suddenly to espy Mrs. Denningham, darted forward with such a

tremendous bound, that he nearly pushed the young lady down; so delighted was he to see his old mistress.

Poor Honoria ran shrieking into the house, and made the old wainscot hall re-echo with her exclamations of terror.

All the servants, as if called together by an alarm bell, came running in the utmost dismay, to know the cause of such an extraordinary outcry. Among the foremost was the old housekeeper, who was before hastening to receive her mistress. "Lawk! miss, what's the matter?" said she, with the utmost consternation depicted on her countenance. "Nothing happened, I hope, to you, miss, or the other ladies?" said she, taking hold of the half-fainting Honoria, and good-naturedly supporting her.

"Oh! the dog, the dog!" replied the young lady, looking toward the door.

Julia, Laura, and the other Miss Alvington now made their appearance, and more clearly explained the cause of Honoria's alarm; when the old housekeeper could not forbear smiling at what she thought the silly fears of their visitor.

"Is that all?" said she, with a truly ludicrous expression of blended disappointment and surprise. "Lawk! miss, you must be very very *narvish*, to be so soon afeard. Poor Leo would not have hurt you: but may be you be subject to them *historical* fits. Come this way, miss: would you please to step into my room for a minute, and take a few of my

cheering drops; I always keep them at hand, for I am sometimes a little low and *narvish* myself. Here, Lucy," said she to her daughter, "go forward and speak to mistress: tell her I made so bold as to take the young lady into my room, just to recover herself before the rest of the company comes, seeing as how she's terribly flustered, poor thing!"

By this time the gentlemen were arrived, and each was alternately engaged in descanting on the merits of the Priory and its adjacent grounds.

"This is a noble park!—fine deer;—a fine country for game, I should imagine," said captain Kinmore. "This place seems to contain all that can render a country life desirable," added he;

and he spoke his sincere sentiments that once, which was rarely the case, for he was a perfect man of the world, as well as a *bon vivant*.

"By my faith this is a fine place! Why, this is equal to any thing we have in dear little Ireland," said sir Carroll; who, as a true Irishman ought, thought his own dear country possessed every advantage under Heaven. "By the powers, those monks and priors were jovial old dogs; they knew what good living was. I dare say they got claret in plenty here, to drink with their venison: this is a famous coast for smuggling: and then, you know, they had the advantage of their neighbours; they could easily give themselves absolution for such a *petty sin* as that of encouraging smugglers!"

"Besides, it was all in the way of trade," observed Kinmore: "the holy fathers, no doubt, could sell them a few *indulgences.*"

"By my faith and I did not think of that; Kinmore, you are before hand with me there: but Denningham must show me his horses. What hunters have ye?—do you ever turn out a stag here?—have you a good pack of hounds?" inquired the lively Hibernian, in one breath; deeming *these* indispensable requisites in the country, particularly with such a noble estate as Westcombe Priory.

Charles could scarcely persuade him, that he had neither. "The estate," he said, "was his aunt's for her life; and his own fortune being comparatively small,

he could not, even if he had the wish, launch out into the style of life sir Carroll had imagined he could: besides, he was of late years very seldom at the Priory; and, moreover, he was not yet of age."

"Och! I see how it is, you are yet under trammels, my boy; but I hope yet to see the day, when you shall go a hunting with me, over there in dear little Ireland: there are the lads of spirit for ye;—they will soon teach you what hunting and drinking is;—and, on my soul, what do we live for but to enjoy ourselves? and in Ireland they have got the knack of making the most of their time that way: all the world over that's well known. Leave Paddy alone; he will be merry, where any other man would break his heart."

Sir Carroll, during this panegyric of his countrymen, evinced, by the hilarity of his own countenance and manners, the most undeniable proof of their and his claim to the justice of the eulogium he had pronounced on the *gaieté de cœur* of the Irish.

There was a singular contrast in the disposition of these two Irishmen. That of sir Carroll is better known to the reader than that of his friend Kinmore, who, beneath the semblance of thoughtless levity, concealed his real motives. He had succeeded in ingratiating himself into the favour of his good-natured companion, who, with a heart open as the day, gave not a thought to the future. Sir Carroll believed all those his friends, who professed themselves such. Kinmore he was firmly attached to; and he

had, to his own loss, very frequently assisted that insidious hypocrite, who, with an eye only to the fortune of his credulous dupe, had led him on from one folly to another, till he had given him such a passion for gaming, that at the time when sir Carroll left Ireland, he was obliged to mortgage the greatest part of his beautiful estate near Killarney.

Kinmore had in the mean time gained a considerable sum, his share of the pillage that he and his vile associates had made of the ample fortune of the thoughtless Sir Carroll; yet Kinmore conducted his plans so artfully, that to the Denninghams he appeared the most disinterested friend, the most prudent adviser, of the young baronet. The undeviating attachment he showed for

sir Carroll, his guarded manner when the violence of his friend's temper would break out, when in the least opposed in any favourite scheme, had won the esteem of Mrs. Denningham; who, capable herself of the most exalted friendship, doubted not for a moment the sincerity of Kinmore's professions.

Having so far won the good will of the old lady, it was no difficult matter to obtain an invitation to the Priory, which was exactly what Kinmore had been aiming at; for he by no means liked the thoughts of being separated from sir Carroll, till he could prevail on him to return to Ireland; and once there, he thought he should make sure of a part of the handsome dowry sir Carroll would receive with Laura Denningham.

Pleasing himself with these nefarious schemes, the cold-hearted villain acted his part to perfection: he danced, sang, flirted with the Miss Alvingtons, assisted Julia in her drawing or music, played cards with Mrs. Denningham, and rode out with her nephew to call on their different neighbours; in short, Kinmore came with the determination to make himself agreeable to all parties, and he fully succeeded.

CHAPTER VI.

JULIA, once again at the Priory, felt more happy than ever; for Laura, (from being in the midst of continual gaiety, and having the prospect of receiving as much company as she pleased, when, as the wife of sir Carroll, she should preside at her own house,) was more complaisant than usual to her sister.

Young and inconsiderate, her vanity was flattered by the idea of becoming, as she expressed herself, "her own mistress." The love of power, and the love of dissipation, reigned triumphant in her breast. The almost certainty of

gratifying her utmost hopes softened the harshness of her temper; and even Julia was treated with kindness: she was allowed to share in the benefit of the change, which had taken place in the manners of this haughty, spoiled child of indulgence.

Happy, because all around her seemed happy, Julia hastened to impart a share of her present felicity, to her constant favourite, Jane Mordaunt: delighted to be again restored to the society of Mrs. Mordaunt and her daughter, Julia, while the other ladies were engaged in arranging their dress after the journey, hastened to the cottage, certain of being joyfully welcomed by both her friends.

During this last visit of Laura at the

Priory, previous to her marriage, Mrs. Denningham frequently invited Miss Mordaunt, to join the parties of pleasure made for the young people then assembled at her house. This attention to Jane was a great annoyance to the Miss Alvingtons, instead of an agreeable acquisition, as would have been imagined, by any but such as were in the secret of their hopes and fears, as to the result of their present visit. These apt scholars of their artful mother, and adviser in their plans, were more than commonly quick in perceiving the interest their dreaded rival had already excited in the *esteem*, if not the *affections*, of Charles Denningham. They now concluded, they had for a certainty discovered the real cause of his indifference for their superior attractions; they despised, yet secretly feared the

influence of the innocent object of their aversion.

Jane Mordaunt, contrary to their belief, remained wholly ignorant of the preference they so much envied her for: the Miss Alvingtons imagined it more likely, that her apparent unconsciousness was a mere artifice, practised the better to secure her conquest.

But the more candid reader will readily imagine it possible, that a girl of seventeen, brought up in retirement, and under the vigilant eye of a tender and prudent mother, should be ignorant of those notions of coquetry and rage for conquest, which the Miss Alvingtons had acquired, by associating only with the most dissipated and trifling among the votaries of fashion.

Simple and unaffected in manners, though not distinguished for beauty, Jane Mordaunt pleased by the native elegance of her deportment and the sweetness of her disposition; and the cultivation of her mind gave her, in the estimation of the few who formed her circle of friends and acquaintance, charms superior to those distinguished for beauty, who appeared too conscious of their claim to admiration.

Modest and retiring, but not awkwardly embarrassed in company, Jane Mordaunt did not, perhaps, *at first*, gain that attention, which Laura Denningham or the Miss Alvingtons attracted in general society: hers was a mind, a character, which improved, which won on the heart imperceptibly. Inobtrusive as she was, and diffident of

her own power to please, it was impossible to be in her company without esteeming her; and never was there a greater contrast than between her and the Miss Alvingtons. This conviction was so impressed on the mind of Charles Denningham, that never were the plans of sir George Alvington and his lady so likely to be frustrated as at this time, while their daughters were on this much wished for visit to Mrs. Denningham.

Sir George had confidently calculated, "that one or other of the girls would succeed in winning the heart of young Denningham."

Contrasted with the delicacy and real elegance of Jane, how disgusting was the sentimental affectation of Honoria,

or the pert flippancy of Georgina! Thus thought Charles as he continued his solitary ramble in the park. His friends that morning he had left for a short time only, hoping, while they were engaged with the ladies, he could steal, unperceived by them, to the cottage, and pay a visit to his old friend, Mrs. Mordaunt. He had long wished to make some inquiries of her after Henry, who, being now in the navy, could be but seldom at home. Perhaps, too, another motive, which he would not so readily own even to himself, led Charles Denningham towards the humble residence of the Mordaunts. Cannot the fair reader guess, that the hope of seeing the lovely *daughter*, as well as the worthy mother, was another very probable reason? Be that as it may, Charles had just crossed the park, and was entering the

little wood path that led to the cottage, when he perceived his sister and Jane Mordaunt at the farther extremity of it. A moment afterward he was by their side, and, giving an arm to each, insisted on attending them in their walk. This neither lady refused; and he accompanied them to Mrs. Mordaunt's, delighted at not having missed them; as it gave him now an opportunity of having the pleasure of conversing with Jane, uninterrupted by the intrusive impertinence of the Miss Alvingtons.

Never did a more happy trio enter the humble dwelling of Mrs. Mordaunt, than Charles, Julia, and Jane. Mrs. Mordaunt welcomed them with good-humoured raillery; and inquired what they had done with their gay com-

panions, meaning Laura and the Alvingtons.

"We left them all apparently very agreeably employed, in listening to the gallant speeches of sir Carroll and captain Kinmore. They are more *au fait* at these things than I can possibly hope to be," said Charles: "the ladies always give the preference to the *red coats*; I have no chance with them," added he.

"Not *always*, I should imagine," said Mrs. Mordaunt, with a half suppressed sigh, as her mind involuntarily reverted to one she had formerly herself given a preference to: he who had long since been numbered with the dead again lived in her imagination.—"The life of her who marries a military man must,

from the nature of his profession, be a continual succession of anxious hopes and fears, and a most severe trial of her fortitude," said that amiable woman, as she reverted in thought to the hardships she had endured, and the anxious cares that had marked her own past life.

"I think I have heard Jane say, she would never marry a man in the army," said Julia; "so you find, brother, *all* ladies are not so mightily taken with a red coat, as you pretend to think."

Charles owned that he had passed too general an accusation, and acknowledged himself in the wrong; but in so animated a manner, and with such a brightened glow on his cheek, that it was evident he was more than commonly pleased; and rejoiced to hear,

that Jane was not likely to be taken with the gay manners of the Irish captain, lately arrived at the Priory.

Miss Mordaunt, perceiving the subject lately alluded to recalled painful reflections to the mind of her mother, purposely changed the topic of conversation, and began to speak of her brother; whom they expected home soon, to spend some time with them, after having been three years absent from England.

This was an event, which both Mrs. Mordaunt and her daughter anxiously anticipated; for Henry was to them their every hope, and his return was to be celebrated at the Priory and at the Cottage as a kind of jubilee.

"The last letter we received was from Sicily," said Jane, in reply to Charles's inquiry after his former companion: "he wrote in excellent spirits, and assured us he was never in better health in his life."

"The climate of Sicily is excellent," said Charles. "I am glad he was not sent to the West Indies; as it was apprehended he would be, when last I heard of him."

"His captain received orders to sail for Sicily, where they have remained stationed ever since," said Mrs. Mordaunt: "but I very much fear my poor boy will be obliged, after all, to go to the West Indies; which is what I dread particularly, for it may well be styled the grave of the Europeans, the climate is

so fatal to the young men sent out there. But I must hope the best; as a sailor, Henry must take his chance," said she; not wishing, by her fears for the future destiny of her son, to damp the joy they all felt in the hope of seeing him so soon.

The morning being uncommonly fine, Mrs. Mordaunt consented to accompany the young people to the school-house, and to overlook the employment of the children, as she had been accustomed to do in the absence of Mrs. Denningham; who, being now particularly engaged in preparation for the wedding, which was so soon to take place, had begged her friend to continue her kind offices at the school. From the circumstance of her having so much company at this time at the Priory, it was not in

the power of Mrs. Denningham to superintend them herself as formerly.

Mrs. Mordaunt, when her declining health would permit of the exertion, usually went two or three times every week, to see that the children were properly attended to, and that they received due rewards for their industry or improvement.

Just as our party had reached the school-house, they met Mrs. Denningham with the ladies, escorted by sir Carroll O'Neal and captain Kinmore.

"My young friends have taken a fancy to see my school-children," said she; "but Laura seems to think such a party of us will terrify the poor things out of their senses."

"What a noise they are making, aunt!" said Laura: "what can be the matter?"

"Oh, nothing; only the old dame is wielding her birchen sceptre," said sir Carroll; "it will be charity to her poor little subjects to go in and put an end to her tyranny: I should like, this minute, to turn them all out on this green to play. The poor little devils would like it much better than being bothered with their A B C."

Mrs. Dennmgham opened the school-door, and the whole party entered; but, to their utter astonishment, they beheld as many as twenty children, of various ages, ranged on either side of the room; each wearing an enormous pair of green gogglers.

"Oh! the little green-eyed monsters!" exclaimed Miss Honoria.

"They have been studying optics," said her sister, "of Mrs. Oldbury, I would lay my life."

"Och! by St. Patrick, even my fine mare Sheelah O'Reilly could not stand this, though she was never known to start in her life," vociferated sir Carroll.

"What can be the meaning of all this?" inquired Mrs. Mordaunt, greatly surprised; yet certain it must be a new whim of her eccentric friend, who now came forward to explain this very singular circumstance. She acknowledged, that Mrs. Oldbury had sent the gogglers for the children, and they were

accordingly sent to the school that morning; as she thought she should not refuse the kindness of that lady, and probably offend her by the rejection of her present: and besides, Mrs. Oldbury seemed perfectly convinced of the utility of the gogglers in preserving the sight; in consequence of which she had given strict orders to the school-mistress, to make each of the children wear a pair of gogglers, while they continued with her during the school-hours.

But this same decree had been with the utmost difficulty enforced: the good old dame in vain coaxed some, and whipped others; the little rebels so much preferred their own eyes, as nature had given them, that it required all the authority their teacher was mistress of, to oblige them to wear the

hated gogglers. Even at the moment when the visitors from the Priory were present, the audible sobs continued to be heard, in spite of the frowns and dumb threats of the dame. One or two of the boldest ventured to slip the gogglers above their brows, and to peep their little laughing eyes from under the green orbs that glared through their flaxen curls. Their appearance was so truly ludicrous, that none of the company could look at them without laughing: Laura and the Alvingtons did not attempt to restrain their expressions of mirth, but continued ridiculing and laughing at this strange whim; and the gentlemen joined them most heartily in the laugh. As such a boisterous party as this had never before entered the school-house, the dame looked quite perplexed: she disliked the new-fangled ways of

making young children like old people; but she did not choose to risk offending Mrs. Denningham by plainly declaring her opinion.

Julia, out of respect to her aunt, would not join, more than she could possibly help, in the excessive mirth of Laura and the young ladies with her; but it was utterly impossible to help laughing at first sight of the little creatures so strangely disguised.

Jane Mordaunt and Charles, from a similar motive, followed her good example; unwilling to wound the feelings of one so truly worthy, though eccentric, as Mrs. Denningham.

While most of the party were engaged in commenting on the green gogglers,

Mrs. Mordaunt took her friend aside, and remonstrated with her on the inutility, not to say folly, of persisting in Mrs. Oldbury's plan. Convinced of the absurdity of this unaccountable whim, Mrs. Denningham gave up the point; and the children were, to their unfeigned delight, released from their bondage, and again allowed the full use of their eyes, unencumbered by green gogglers.

On their return to the Priory, Mrs. Denningham consulted with her friend respecting a manufactory among the poor for making matting, such as Mrs. Paterson had lent her a specimen of; which she was very desirous for Mrs. Mordaunt to see, thinking she must approve of *this* new scheme, however she disliked the last mentioned. But here, too, she was disappointed; for Mrs.

Mordaunt decidedly said it would not succeed; and it would, besides, be much better to encourage the art of spinning and knitting, or twenty other employments, more likely by far to benefit the poor.

But, sanguine in her expectations, our visionary could not so easily be prevailed on to give up all thought of the matting manufactory, as she had the use of the green gogglers: "she would first," she said, "hear what Mr. Morland had to say on the business."

It must be allowed, in justice to Mrs. Denningham, that *all* her disappointments with respect to benefitting the poor were not owing to her own want of judgment; but sometimes her very best, and most rational plans, were

thwarted by the perverseness and ignorance of the peasantry, whose welfare she sought to promote.

For instance, she had one year, owing to the scarcity and high price of bread, purchased at a great expense an immense quantity of rice, and given out in portions, (according to the number in family,) to the different poor people in the neighbourhood; but, instead of being grateful for her bounty, the greater number of the pensioners declared, that "eating rice would make them blind; and that they could not eat it, even to *oblige* madam."—"Besides, what use was it giving them *rice*, unless she gave them *butter* and *sugar* to eat with it!"

Another time, when she had made for them a great quantity of excellent soup,

to give as the rice had been; after the first week, not one of all the poor people came to fetch it. On inquiry, she found, that owing to her having unfortunately purchased the large copper, (in which the soup was boiled,) of a friend of hers, a physician, who had just left the village of Westcombe, the prejudiced people had taken it into their heads, that he had used the copper to boil dead bodies in, to prepare them as skeletons for his anatomical studies. Nothing could do away this absurd notion: it was urged in vain by the housekeeper, that her mistress was certain the boiler had been used only for brewing. It was impossible to convince the stubborn multitude, "that the doctor had never boiled his *notamies* in it;" for so they expressed themselves.

'This method of relieving the poor was obliged to be given up, and another, more thankfully accepted, adopted in its stead. Small portions of corn and potatoes being distributed, crowds of pensioners arrived daily at the gates of the Priory; who with unfeigned gratitude received the gift of charity, and the name of Mrs. Denningham was blessed as the generous benefactress of the indigent; thus evincing, that, even in doing good, discrimination and judgment must guide the benevolent donor; and regard to the popular prejudices of those they wish to relieve must be observed, or their most laudable endeavours may prove ineffectual.

CHAPTER VII.

MRS. Denningham had, previous to her quitting London, resolved, on the marriage of Laura, to part with her house in town, and reside for the future entirely at Westcombe. Nothing could be more agreeable to the wishes of Julia than this arrangement; and the Mordaunts participated warmly in her satisfaction, as they should now be more frequently together than hitherto had been possible, from Mrs. Denningham's frequent visits of several months to the metropolis.

To Julia the pleasure of enjoying the society of her amiable friends wholly

uninterrupted was in part a compensation for the expected departure of her sister. Laura, it had been agreed, was to set off for Ireland immediately on her marriage; and, little as she herself felt at the idea of a separation from those who had nurtured her infancy, and loved her with the tenderness of a parent and a sister, the affectionate Julia deeply regretted its necessity.

Laura, on the contrary, felt not the loss of Julia's society, or the unbounded indulgence of her aunt. She now only anticipated the admiration she should excite on her first appearance in Dublin as a bride, entitled as she would be, from her own and her husband's rank, to mix in the first circles of that gay metropolis.

Westcombe Priory, the family residence of the Denninghams, was a beautiful and massy pile of building, situate in the most remote part of the north of Devon, not far from the small sea-port of Ilfracombe. The country around is beautifully grand, and imposing in the extreme; but the Priory itself did not command the most striking points of view. The reverend founder of this monastic seclusion had preferred the calm shelter of a wooded vale to the towering heights, that hung their frowning steeps over the ever restless flood that roared beneath.

Deep in the bosom of the combe or glen, the venerable walls of the Priory seemed to derive an added sanctity from the calm stillness that reigned

around: all seemed to conspire to lull the busy thoughts of worldly ambition, and insensibly to breathe into the heart a purer emotion, a more dignified hope, than aught the world itself could realize. The spirit of devotion had consecrated the spot, and gave a solemn but pleasing grandeur to the surrounding scenery.

The combe, or valley, from which the Priory took its name, was beautifully wooded, and formed a striking contrast to the bare craggy heights, which rose above in proud magnificence. The grounds in the immediate vicinity of the building were now tastefully adorned, but still preserved the peculiar character of the original plan.

The Hospitalier, or Pilgrim's Lodge, situate at the farther extremity of the

domain, was now converted into an entrance or porter's lodge, from which the road led through the park to the principal front of the Priory, which lost none of its peculiar beauty by this modern arrangement. The gray walls and antique form of the massy pile shone conspicuous, yet partially shaded amid the dark foliage of the clumps of yew and cypress, which, according to ancient custom, formed so predominant a feature in the gardens of the Priory.

Still more distant, groves of aged oaks waved their venerable branches; and appeared, by their magnitude, coeval with the structure they sheltered from the rude blasts of the tempest.

Still deeper in the vale rose the ruins of the chapel, just seen in melancholy

decay, tinted by the various lichens and mosses that adorned its broken fragments.

The hollow murmur of the breeze, passing amid the solemn shades, that enveloped the broken arches of the chapel;—the gentle rippling of the mountain stream, that wound its insidious way beneath the covert of tangled shrubs and brambles; which partly impeded its progress; gave a charm, a soothing melancholy, to every surrounding object:—they spoke a lesson to the heirs of mortality, who yet trod its consecrated precincts. Beneath those tottering walls slept the departed fathers of the Priory; beside them lay enshrined in costly monuments their proud successors, who usurped their prede-

cessors' domains, sanctioned by the imperious will of lawless tyranny. These too lay beneath shrowded in the dust: generation after generation had fallen to decay, as the leaves of those sheltering trees, that now shaded their mortal remains. The current of life had gone by, and borne them from the heights of ambition to the still, cold vault of the sepulchre. Time had not spared the youthful or the gay, the warrior or the sage:—the blast of the tempest passed by neither the tender bud, nor the sear and mellowed leaf of autumn. Here, recorded by hands long since mouldered in the dust, stood the names and deeds of many a valiant chief, and many a tribute to departed worth. Here, too, was traced the simple pious resignation of a parent's woe, that pointed out the

tomb of youth and innocence,—death's victim even in the very spring of life, the bloom of early childhood.

From scenes like these we must now conduct the reader to the distant boundary of the Priory domains, which, stretching along the utmost verge of the coast, commanded a prospect that might have warmed the coldest heart to unbounded admiration.

The sea, roaring in wild rage beneath the craggy mass that formed the overhanging cliff, filled the deep caverns with its heaving foam, bursting in wild fury over the weedy rocks that lay at the base. The waves, dashing with never-ceasing restlessness, bounding from their rocky bed with impetuous velocity, fell again in one continual

shower, their whitened spray casting a cloud-like mist over the intervening objects;—then, receding with a tremendous rush, left the sandy beach bestrewed with the disjointed fragments recently torn from their parent rocks, or dragged by the impetuous surge from the deep caves that yawned around.

The blue hills of Wales rose in the distance, and faintly bounded the horizon. Farther down the channel to the left, the grey cliffs of Lundy, seen in imperfect haziness, stretched their faint line along the waters, blended with either element in distant obscurity. Innumerable vessels spread their whitened sails, and seemed to court the gently fanning breezes of the summer sky, to waft them to the port of opulence and commerce.

Beneath the cliff, nearer to the coast, lay dispersed (thick as insects in the evening gale) the small craft and fishing-boats belonging to the adjacent port of Combe, the entrance into which could faintly be discovered to the right, sheltered by the proud and magnificent Hillsborough, whose rocky steep towered above the neighbouring cliffs, stretching its rugged base far into the dashing flood beneath.

To return to the vicinity of the Priory and the coast adjacent, along the cliffs we were before exploring, I will call the reader's attention to a small cell midway down the cliff, partly concealed, by the rude entrance being nearly shaded from view by the marine plants that had encroached on its precincts, now untrodden, except by the

foot of some lone traveller, anxious to explore this famed relic of former superstition. Once a cell of prayer and penitence, this had been the abode of the venerable founder of the Priory, of whom wondrous tales of marvellous renown were still extant. Here he sought to mortify his flesh by abstinence the most rigorous; and, by the deepest penitence, to blot out the misdeeds of his early life.

The cave of Father Vincent was renowned throughout the country. A consecrated well of the purest water sprang from the rock adjacent, famous for its healing virtues, and from its being entirely free from all brackishness; which, from its extreme contiguity to the ocean that rolled beneath, was in former days considered as miraculous.

Over this singular fountain, in the dark ages of superstition, had been erected a gothic arch of rude workmanship. On its centre was engraved, in scarcely legible characters, a Latin inscription, warning the pilgrim who sought the salutary waters of the well, to seek likewise the waters of life; and to drink deep at the blessed fountain, whose sacred power could alone give eternal salvation, and could redeem the health of the soul, as the pure crystal wave did that of the body.

On a lofty crag, that jutted over the cave, stood the remains of a kind of chapel, dedicated to St. Nicholas, the patron of mariners. A winding path from the Priory chapel led through the

tangled underwood of the glen, to the steep ascent of the cliff. Here, in monastic times, masses had been said for those who had perished at sea: and processions were made by the holy prior and his brethren, in honour of the patron saint, from the Priory adjacent to this romantic, solitary spot. Where now the sea-gull built its nest, and fostered its screaming young, the torches of the fathers had blazed, and the choral hymn had been chanted. Here, during the winter's bitter blast, the tempest's rage, the pious children of religious enthusiasm had "bided the pelting of the pitiless storm," to raise on high the holy cross of religious faith, and the consecrated banner of their saint. On that very crag they had often stood with flaming torches,

and burning brands, to guide the hapless wretches who struggled with the boiling flood beneath. To those they could not save from the devouring jaws of death, they pointed out the hope of eternal blessedness,—the hope of salvation by him who had shed his blood for them on the cross, the emblem of which they then bore in triumph to bless the dying eyes of the helpless sufferers, who, gasping with death, stretched their upraised arms to Heaven imploring mercy.

This sacred remnant of former ages,—this desolated fragment of what it had once been, had long fallen a prey to the unsparing hand of time. But its hallowed purpose, its consecrated remains, were still revered with pious awe by the pea-

santry of the adjacent hamlets: a feeling of veneration undefinable pervaded the most ignorant, whilst they gazed on the crumbling walls of this little chapel. The peasant girls would, on the anniversary of the saint, still resort thither, and on the first dawn of the day sprinkle the simple altar (that was still preserved) with the choicest flowers they could collect: for each nosegay thus bestowed, plucking, as their reward, a sprig of some wild flower that reared its uncultivated blossoms among the rude fragments of the shrine once dedicated to the patron saint. These, or the moss that clothed the rugged stones with its grey mantle of age, were by the simple village maids preserved with ignorant but guileless superstition, and considered as a safeguard to those of their friends, who

had to brave the dangers of the deep, —a charm to save them from the perils they would probably encounter.

But far different had been the fate of the cave before alluded to: this, once the gloomy asylum of a mind ever fraught with religious enthusiasm, erroneous in its faith, had of late years become the haunt of a desperate and lawless race, the hiding-place, the secure retreat of smugglers, who, in the secret inner chambers of the cavern, which extended some way under the solid rock, stored their contraband goods, unsuspected by their pursuers.

Even so late as when Mrs. Denningham came into possession of the Westcombe estates, this cell had been thus profaned: but the vigilance of the of-

ficers in the neighbouring town had at length detected the practice; and, the secret being once made known, no more of the late lawless intruders dared venture to shelter themselves or their stores in the far-famed cave of Father Vincent, or there to pledge his saintship in full bumpers of pure Geneva, as had till lately been their custom.

CHAPTER VIII.

ON the day fixed, and not long after their return to the Priory, Laura Denningham became the wife of sir Carroll O'Neal; and immediately proceeded to Dublin, and thence to his estate near the beautiful lake of Killarney.

In the gaiety of a continual round of visiting and receiving of company, Laura had not the leisure, any more than the inclination, to doubt the continuance of such gay prospects. In the enjoyment of the present all thought of the future was lost: she and her equally thoughtless partner dashed away in the highest style of elegance; nor ever

dreamt of bounding their expenses to the real limits of their income. Wholly occupied in the indulgence of her vanity and love of dissipation, lady O'Neal was insensible to the loss she had sustained in being deprived of the society of her aunt and sister: inconsiderate and selfish, she no longer regretted the pain she had occasioned them by this separation, and scarcely expressed a wish to see them again.

When sir Carroll O'Neal and his lady returned to Ireland, the families acquainted with the young baronet received him and his lovely bride with every demonstration of friendship and hospitality, which the most sanguine expectations of either could hope for; and the beautiful lady O'Neal had the supreme delight, to find herself every where de-

clared the reigning belle. Proud of her beauty and the universal admiration she excited, the enraptured sir Carroll had neither the inclination nor prudence to set bounds to her extravagance. Himself associating with all his former dissipated companions, and still accompanied by his designing pretended friend Kinmore, sir Carroll and lady O'Neal were in a fair way to spend the ample fortune, which Mrs. Denningham had bestowed on her niece. In the generosity of her heart, and her over fondness for Laura, she had, to add to her dowry, sold her town house, and added the purchase-money to the sum formerly intended for her portion.

Our enthusiastic visionary did not then consider the injury she was doing her nephew and Julia: in being thus

profuse to lady O'Neal, she had left herself nothing now but the West-India property, which in itself was of such precarious value. Charles, it is true, was already provided for;—the Priory was, after the death of Mrs. Denningham, to devolve to him; added to this, he inherited what property his father had in Jamaica, which was not very considerable, owing to the heavy losses Mr. Denningham had met with a short time before his death. On account of this, Mrs. Denningham had engaged to provide for both of her nieces entirely; which promise, of course, left them quite dependent on her generosity, which neither of the orphans had the least reason to doubt, but of her prudence many were dubious. In this last instance of her misguided liberality, she had risked more than she ought for one

niece, while the other was yet unprovided for. Should her aunt by any chance expend her remaining property, Julia would find herself cast on an unfeeling world, a portionless orphan; and, brought up in all the indulgences of affluence, she would then be reduced to the absolute necessity of gaining her own subsistence.

Mrs. Denningham thought not of the possible consequences of her unbounded generosity to Laura: she still calculated upon the estate she possessed abroad, and had not the most distant idea she had been led into any injustice by her over-weening partiality for her favourite.

In parting with Laura, she seemed at first to have lost all that rendered life desirable; but her mind, versatile

alike either in youth or age, could not long dwell on the same idea; and however violent her grief was for the loss of her niece, a few months after the departure of Laura found Mrs. Denningham reconciled to her absence, and again engaged as much as usual in some novel pursuit. Castle upon castle was erected in her fertile imagination; and, having no more permanent foundation than many she had previously constructed, they too successively vanished, "and, like the baseless fabric of a vision, left not a wreck behind."

From the contemplation of these romances of a full-fraught fancy, our deluded visionary was called to the accomplishment of her former hopes respecting her nephew, who at length received the due notice from India, that

the appointment from which he had expected so much was at length secured to him; but it would be necessary Charles should immediately proceed to that country, to take the very lucrative situation thus provided for him by lord Elbury, the friend of the late Mr. Denningham.

"Well, Charles," said Mrs. Denningham to her nephew, on his reading her the letter from his noble patron, "I shall yet, I hope, live to see you a great Nabob." But, much to her surprise, Charles did not appear so sanguine as herself in these high expectations; or his hopes were damped by the conviction that he must so soon quit England, and in it all his hopes of happiness,—a happiness which not all the riches of the East could compensate for the loss of.

He would sustain an irreparable loss if deprived of his beloved Jane, which, in his estimation, no wealth, no aggrandisement could make amends for. With Jane Mordaunt, Charles Denningham felt he could prefer the most humble cottage to all the magnificence of a palace:—"what were wealth, rank, and even princely power, if not shared with her he loved?"

Thus reasoned the young impassioned lover. Can it be surprising, then, that he should not enter so warmly into the views of his aunt as she expected? Whilst her ardent imagination was flying over the vast continent of Asia, the most distant regions of the East, his had wandered to the beloved precincts of Mrs. Mordaunt's lonely mansion:—with the modest unassuming Jane his

fancy dwelt with fond delight, as he recalled the happy hours he there had passed, blessed with the society of her he loved:—and now, just when the hope that he should one day call her his own had first dawned in his youthful breast, now to be called on to resign her,—to quit even the hope of ever beholding her again, was almost more than his fortitude could bear.

To one so young, so impassioned, the trial was most severe; but it must be borne: he had no actual possessions of his own, whatever his future expectations might be. And so affectionate and dutiful was Charles in his estimation of the regard due to his aunt, that never for a moment would he allow himself to anticipate her death, by dwelling upon

the certainty he then had of inheriting her landed property in England. The small sum he could call his own was not sufficient to enable him to marry; and even the remittances due to him and his aunt had not been paid for the last two or three years, so extremely uncertain were the emoluments then derivable from West-India property. In this state of affairs, it would be folly almost to madness to give up the lucrative appointment now offered him, and for which he had been educated.

Thus torn by the contending emotions of prudence and affection, he knew not what to decide on for some time; till at length, after much debate with himself, he came to the resolution to make known his difficulties to Mrs. Den-

ningham, who had ever been to him the kindest and most disinterested friend. She had in a manner sanctioned his affection for Jane, for whom she had frequently expressed herself as greatly interested, both on her account and that of her worthy parent. She must have observed his attachment to that amiable girl, thought Charles; and she had not once attempted to dissuade him from making her his companion for life. Vanity had of late whispered the youth, or the quick eye of love had discerned, that Jane was not wholly indifferent to his addresses.

During the whole of the past summer, which had been spent at Westcombe by the Denninghams, the inhabitants of the Priory and the cottage seemed to have

formed but one family, so frequently were they together. Jane was the inseparable companion of Julia in all the different excursions and parties formed for the amusement of her and Charles, during his stay in the country; and at each of these frequent interviews, Jane had gained in the admiration and esteem of Charles, till, insensibly to each party, friendship heightened into affection a preference for each other, which afterwards not even time or absence was suffered to change.

This attachment had not passed unnoticed by Mrs. Denningham or the mother of Jane. Mrs. Mordaunt had lately alluded to it, when conversing with her friend on confidential subjects: she then reminded Mrs. Denningham of her

daughter's want of fortune, for she could herself leave her a very small pittance, barely enough to subsist on; and unless an old relation of hers should leave her any of his immense riches, this was all her child had to expect for the future.

Mrs. Denningham, ever noble-minded and generous in the extreme, declared, that if this were the only obstacle, it should not prevent the union of her nephew and Jane: though as she and Charles were yet so young, nothing should be said to them on this subject; at the expiration of the next year, when the latter would be of age, the young people should have her consent, and she would do all in her power to add to their small fortune.

Of this liberal determination Charles was yet quite ignorant; though on his owning to her the real motive for his wish to remain in England, he was not greatly astonished to find she was already mistress of the important secret.

Mrs. Denningham owned, that her plans for his aggrandisement had, for a moment, banished all thought of Jane from her mind. "But I may be excused, I hope, as I am no *lover* of the young lady, though her sincere *friend*," said his aunt; "and you have my full permission, to make known your sentiments to Jane herself, and hear what she has to say on this subject."

"And not leave England!" said Charles, his fine eyes beaming with joy.

"Unless you can prevail on Mrs. Mordaunt to let you take her daughter with you to India," replied his aunt; "that is what I am thinking of. You and Jane are young, it is true; but I think I can rely upon the prudence of you both," said she, affectionately; "so go and make what fine speeches you can to win the mother and daughter."

Charles lost not a moment in any farther debate, but hastened to the cottage, and finding Jane alone, he proceeded to disclose to her his hopes of future happiness, if she would consent to be his.

Jane Mordaunt, with the natural candour of her disposition, did not wholly discourage his professions; but owned that, if her mother would give her consent, she should prefer him to every

other lover, who had yet sought to win her affections.

But Charles had not then explained how peculiarly he was circumstanced, —that he must either bear her from her beloved parent (now fast sinking to decay), or he must renounce for her the hopes of his family, by giving up the appointment in India. In his earnestness to secure the acceptance of Jane, he had omitted to recur to this very important point; but when he afterwards explained his sanguine hopes to the mother of Jane, and besought her consent to their union, this became an insuperable bar to his happiness.

Mrs. Mordaunt deemed it most imprudent for him to think of taking a young wife to India, before he had

established himself there, and had ensured a provision for himself and her. She again stated the trifle her daughter would receive of her, which, with his income, would be barely sufficient in England to support them according to his rank; that much could not yet be expected of his aunt, who had Julia to provide for out of her foreign property.

"But, in India, I shall have an ample provision," said Charles; "more than sufficient for our expenses. I shall be of age in a few months, and then I shall have at least sufficient to begin with; that will support us till I have been long enough abroad, to obtain emolument from my appointment there."

"Dear Denningham, you calculate like a novice in the world; you take

only the fair side of the question," said Mrs. Mordaunt. "Not that I wish to cast a gloom over your brilliant prospects: wait a few years, you are both young; rely upon my assurance, that it will be greatly to your advantage hereafter, however painful it may be at present to be separated for so long a period. But from experience, bitter experience," said she, "I know more of the world than you do. You are not certain, that the climate of India will agree with you: how could you, in case it did not, keep your situation there? or what would become of my child, if she were to lose you? Left utterly destitute, perhaps too with a young family, left wholly unprovided with the means of supporting them; think what would be her misery. Oh! Charles, I have suffered this bitter anguish, I have felt it all! and can I

wilfully place my own child, my beloved Jane, in such extremity of wretchedness? I cannot, much as I esteem you, I cannot consent to your becoming the husband of Jane. If I had the fortune I once was likely to possess,—had I the means of establishing you in life, Heaven be my witness, I would gladly promote your happiness; but as it is, I must refuse to sanction your hopes."

Charles, affected by the impressive manner with which Mrs. Mordaunt had pronounced his doom, could not for some moments resume the argument. It was in vain (on being about to return home) that he again pleaded his cause with all the eloquence that love inspired: Mrs. Mordaunt was firm in her refusal. All that he could obtain favourable to his wishes was, that after three years,

when Jane should be of age and able to judge for herself, if she then consented to accept him, no objection should be raised on her part.

This slender hope was all the anxious lover could gain to beguile his present misery. All his gay visions were in an instant vanished; three years of painful suspense he had yet to endure: in so long a space of time, as it then appeared, what changes might not take place! Jane might, forgetting his unalterable attachment, suffer her affections to be engaged by another in his absence; many rivals might endeavour to supplant him: what would life then be to him, when once deprived of her he so devotedly loved?

Slowly retracing his way to the Priory

in melancholy reflection, he was met by his aunt in the park, at no great distance from the house. Perceiving by the visible dejection of her nephew, that he had been unsuccessful in his mission, she would not at first lead to the subject which had evidently caused him so much disquiet. Addressing him with more than even her accustomed affection, she began to converse with him on some indifferent topic; but Charles, not heeding her remark, began to relate all that had passed in his interview with Mrs. Mordaunt: his mind was at that moment too much absorbed by grief and disappointment, to allow one other thought to engage his attention.

Mrs. Denningham was not less surprised than her nephew, at the positive refusal of her friend; but, upon reflec-

tion, she could not but allow her arguments were just, though she herself had not had foresight enough to perceive the imprudence of what she had been induced to sanction with her consent. Knowing that, from the firmness of Mrs. Mordaunt's decision, it would be vain to plead the cause of her nephew, she endeavoured to encourage him with the prospects he had yet in store for the future.

Julia participated in the grief of her brother, and sought, by all the little devices which sisterly affection could dictate, to assure him he had nothing to fear as to his influence over the heart of Jane Mordaunt. "She knew," she said, "that no time, no absence would ever diminish her affection for him: that Jane's was not a heart likely to be

changed by circumstances; and she had herself been too long in the confidence of that beloved friend, to doubt the constancy of her disposition."

These well-meant endeavours to console were not wholly lost on Charles: he again sought an interview with Jane; and though he heard her full determination to abide by the opinion of her mother, yet he derived the greatest consolation from her assurances, that she would not retract the consent to become his, when she could do so with the entire approbation of that beloved parent.

I must pass over the short interval between the time now mentioned, and that of Charles's departure from his native country.

The final farewell was a most distressing event to all parties, but to none more so than to Jane Mordaunt. Her heart ached, as she dwelt on the dangers he was about to encounter; but for his sake she endeavoured to subdue her grief, and assume a composure she could not feel. Beside her mother and Mrs. Denningham, Julia, the affectionate companion of her childhood, now alone remained to soothe her affliction, and to cheer the loneliness of her present situation.

The inhabitants of the Priory and the cottage all bore an air of mournful dejection for some days after the departure of Charles Denningham: but when time had lessened the first poignancy of their grief, Mrs. Denningham amused them with the hopes she im-

parted of his speedy return, and her various plans for the happiness of all parties. By this amiable condescension she enlivened her little domestic circle, and more firmly attached them, particularly the Mordaunts, to herself and family.

Julia and her young friend, (with the facility of youth ever prone to view their future prospects in the fairest light,) encouraged by the vivacity of Mrs. Mordaunt and Mrs. Denningham, soon resumed their former pursuits and amusements with all their wonted alacrity; and, in the society of each other, they no longer indulged in vain repinings at those evils they were unable to prevent.

In less time than could have been

expected, from the length of the voyage, they received the pleasing intelligence of Charles Denningham's arrival in India. This, as may be imagined, gave renewed spirits to the whole family at Westcombe. Charles was in good health when he wrote, and appeared much gratified at the reception he met with from lord Elbury, who treated him with marked attention and kindness, as the only son of his dearest friend, and, as such, had introduced his *protégé* to several families of distinction. Charles, in his letter assured Jane, that he wanted nothing to make him quite happy, but the society of those dearer friends he had left in England.

CHAPTER IX.

During the last year, since the marriage of Laura, Mrs. Denningham had received but few visitors at the Priory, except Mr. Morland occasionally, and the Mordaunts; the Alvingtons she had renounced all acquaintance with of late. Since her nephew had come of age, she had been convinced of the injustice and want of principle, visible in the conduct of sir George towards his ward. Probably he would have been more alive to the interest of Charles Denningham, had he judged it likely he would become his own son-in-law: this hope being frustrated, he had neither

the inclination nor the leisure to superintend the management of the small property which belonged to that young man; and, entirely owing to his neglect, a great part of what was due in arrears remained unpaid, when it was his duty, as the guardian to Charles, to insist on its payment. But, wholly engrossed by his own pursuits, sir George Alvington cared but little for the welfare of the son of his former friend, the late Mr. Denningham.

The Miss Alvingtons, piqued at the indifference of Charles, and mortified at the preference he had given to Miss Mordaunt, notwithstanding their superior beauty and accomplishments, revenged themselves for the slight, by ridiculing him and his aunt in every family in town they were acquainted

with. They asserted, that the former had wished much to ingratiate himself into their favour; but that their father would not hear of either of them accepting Charles Denningham, when they could any day marry so much more to their advantage; "for what was he? he was only the son of a West India planter!"

From the time that Mrs. Denningham had been deprived of the society of her favourite Laura, she had unconsciously become more attached to Julia. Encouraged by this change, Julia became more animated, more anxious to excel in whatever she knew would be most pleasing to her aunt. The comfort this affectionate conduct imparted, counterbalanced, in part, the affliction that amiable woman was doomed to suffer

from the ingratitude and folly of her eldest niece; whose behaviour was the very reverse of all it ought to have been to one so kind and generous, as Mrs. Denningham had ever proved herself to the unthinking self-willed lady O'Neal. On the marriage of her niece, a liberal portion had been bestowed on her; but this, with the broken fortune of sir Carroll, was not sufficient to support the establishment with which they had begun. This Mrs. Denningham had represented to Laura, who, haughty and impatient of control, and now considering herself at full liberty to act as she pleased, despised her proposals of retrenchment, and rejected her friendly advice, although given in the mildest and most affectionate manner; and our poor visionary found herself most severely disappointed in her sanguine ex-

pectations of her darling niece. The ingratitude and utter indifference of Laura pierced her to the heart; and bitterly she lamented her own folly, in having, by her blind indulgence, and fondness almost to adoration, laid the foundation of those vices, which showed themselves in the disposition of the cold-hearted, selfish lady O'Neal; once the idol of her hopes, and the object of her pride.

Before the first three years had elapsed since the marriage of lady O'Neal, she and sir Carroll had expended the whole of the sum that had been paid by Mrs. Denningham. Laura wrote to her aunt, and represented their distress, urging her to assist sir Carroll; for in case of this being denied, they

should be obliged to sell their house in Dublin; which, she declared, would make her the most miserable of human beings: and this must be the case, if a certain sum of money, which he had lost at the gaming table, could not be paid by other means. She entreated Mrs. Denningham would advance the sum required, which should be punctually repaid in a few months at farthest.

The indulgent aunt, unwilling to chagrin her niece by a refusal, immediately lent her all the ready money she could spare, which was more than sufficient to clear the debt, which had been so imprudently incurred by sir Carroll. She at the same time warned lady O'Neal, that this was the last money

they must hope to receive of her; that the remainder of her property she must reserve for Julia and her brother.

Lady O'Neal had not once expressed a wish to see either her aunt or sister at her own house, during her long absence from England: she knew, she said, the dislike her aunt had to take any excursion by sea, however short the distance. This was one excuse she pleaded for her neglect; and she readily availed herself of it, for not asking Mrs. Denningham to visit her and sir Carroll in Dublin. But, in fact, she did not really wish for the company either of her aunt or sister: too cold-hearted to feel grateful for the unbounded affection of Mrs. Denningham, she only feared her interference, and that, should she take the resolution to visit them in Ire-

land, she would not approve of the manner in which they lived, so much beyond their real income. Another still more powerful reason had Laura for not wishing to see her relations; and this was, that the increased beauty of her sister excited her envy: she feared Julia would rival her in the estimation of the *beau monde* of Dublin.

Lady O'Neal had been once in England since her marriage, and could not but remark the rapid improvement in the person and manners of her sister; whilst her own beauty was fast fading away, in consequence of the dissipated life she had led amid the thoughtless votaries of fashion.

Julia, now eighteen, was an uncommonly interesting girl; more lovely, in

the estimation of many, than her sister had been, even at the same age, when in the zenith of her beauty. Julia's was a more amiable turn of expression: the benevolence of her heart shone in the soft lustre of her mild blue eyes, while the smile of innocent gaiety gave animation to her lovely countenance. Perfectly unaffected, she seemed unconscious of her own superior power of pleasing, while it was her study to oblige: her winning address gained her many sincere friends; among whom none were more sincerely so than the Mordaunts, who still continued to reside near the Priory.

Jane had ever shared the confidence of Julia; and Mrs. Mordaunt was considered by her more as a parent than a mere acquaintance.

During the last three years, Julia had, from the increased kindness of her aunt, which had encouraged her assiduity, become equally skilled in all superficial accomplishments with her sister; and in all essential acquirements, owing to the tuition of Mrs. Mordaunt, she far surpassed Laura. Her beauty was more attractive, and failed not to excite the admiration of many; while her good sense and affability prevented her exciting that envy and ill-will, which the pride and arrogant conceit of Laura had frequently incurred.

Julia was now all that her fond aunt could wish her. The alteration in the manners, and the great improvement of personal beauty in her sister, were perceived with surprise and vexation by lady O'Neal, when she returned to Eng-

land for a short time: she could scarcely believe, that the "dull, spiritless Julia," who never had a word to say for herself, should now be transformed into the elegant, lively girl she then beheld her.

But the haughty Laura did not stay to consider, that her own ill treatment of her sister had formerly repressed her spirits, and checked her wish to please.

"Really, aunt, you put Julia too forward; such a chit as she is, a mere child!" said lady O'Neal, with her accustomed *hauteur*.

"Child as she is, she is now the same age you were, Laura, when you chose to act for yourself, against my more experienced judgment," replied Mrs.

Denningham, with more than her usual sedateness of manner when addressing her favourite.

Lady O'Neal felt the retort: she knew, even more than she chose to own, how much she had been to blame, and how certain she was of suffering for all her former self-willed perverseness.

Lady O'Neal had become a mother; but her helpless infant, from its being left entirely to the care of servants, fell a victim to the negligence of its unnatural parent; who, deaf to the voice of nature, had abandoned it to strangers, while *she*, hurried on by the love of dissipation, sought her own gratification alone, unmindful of the sufferings of her deserted babe.

Mrs. Denningham had hoped, that time would steady the giddy thoughtless Laura: but as the heart was bad, this was a vain hope; unless some unexpected and severe trial, of greater magnitude than she had hitherto experienced, should force reflection and repentance on her niece. Lady O'Neal was yet young, it might be argued in her behalf; but she had not a mind open to conviction, or a heart capable of feeling.

Mrs. Denningham, as was natural, still hoped the best; but had it not been for the soothing kindness of Julia, she would probably have sunk under the neglect and ingratitude of lady O'Neal.

Charles, her other favourite, was far distant; Julia alone remained to comfort

and support her declining life. Pecuniary difficulties pressed hard upon her: she had again remitted another sum of money to the O'Neals; and, at length, found herself under the necessity of selling part of her property abroad, from which she had of late years received but trifling sums of her agent. She had been under the painful obligation of lessening her charitable donations to the poor for the last year, and of setting bounds to her own family expenditure. She knew this intelligence would grieve her nephew, should he be informed of her embarrassments; and he would undoubtedly blame her for continuing to supply Laura with the money she wanted for herself and Julia. She had, therefore, cautioned her niece not to mention this circumstance in her letters to her brother; and the same injunction

was extended to Jane Mordaunt; as it would only add to his anxiety, and it was not in his power to serve them essentially. Neither would Mrs. Denningham have consented to take any part of the small property he possessed, which, even with what he could yet have saved since his residence in India, must be but inconsiderable.

She had been herself ever too liberal, even to profusion, to lay by any part of the rents of the Priory estates; and now, from the failure of her foreign payments, and the sums she remitted continually to Ireland, she found herself reduced to comparative poverty. With her usual activity of mind, she set about planning some method, to extricate herself from the present difficulty.

"I have a great mind to let the Priory for a year or two," said she to Mrs. Mordaunt, when conversing alone with her on what would be the best plan to adopt:—"it is in vain to continue here; I shall only involve myself, and injure that dear child Julia, whom I have already too much wronged."

"It will be a severe trial," said her friend: "I would have you consider well of it, before you resolve to leave Westcombe; though if Mr. Morland advises it, I think I would let the Priory, till something can be settled about the West India property."

"But suppose I were to take a trip to Jamaica myself," said Mrs. Denningham, "instead of sending, which I am inclined to think the best way of pro-

ceeding; would you set this down as one of my romantic flights?"

"I most certainly should," replied Mrs. Mordaunt; "at your age it would be extremely imprudent. At all events, I would not think of such a hazardous expedition, unless absolutely necessary."

The entrance of Julia here interrupted the conference; and Mrs. Denningham, anxious to know how her niece would bear the idea of quitting the Priory, began to question her on the subject, half jestingly and half in earnest; but she said not a word of her more recent intention, of going herself to the West Indies.

Just as she had begun her cautious inquiries into the state of Julia's feel-

ings on the proposed departure from Westcombe, she received a letter from lady O'Neal. "I am glad you have heard from Laura," said Julia; "I began to fear I had offended my sister, for she has never answered my two last letters; yet if she did but know my heart, she would not doubt my affection. In her last letter to me, she said something which I did not clearly comprehend, of your laying by all your money for me. This I would on no account wish; the bare mention of it hurt me exceedingly. I hope I shall never be the means of checking your liberality to my sister: I could never be happy, and know that she was in distress. Sir Carroll is much to blame, more so than poor Laura; it would be cruel to let her suffer for his extravagance," said the amiable girl, with tears in her eyes.

"I have done the utmost in my power for her; I can do no more. I have no property in England except this estate of the Priory, and that is so willed that it cannot be sold: the most I can do, is to let it, and live with you, my love, in a cottage: do you think you could reconcile your mind to this plan, Julia, in case nothing else can be done for us abroad?" said Mrs. Denningham, wishing to try how her niece would bear this diminution of their prospects.

"Dear aunt," said Julia, "I should be happy any where, however humble the dwelling, provided I was allowed to remain with you."

"My dearest child, I trust that we shall never be compelled to separate for

any *great* length of time, till I can see you well settled in life. I hope *you* will make a more prudent choice than your *sister* has: but I have deserved to be disappointed in my hopes of her; I made her my idol, and I am rightly punished for my folly, by her base ingratitude. There is a letter from her at last; but is that such a one as you could have sent me?" said the old lady, endeavouring to stifle her sobs of anguish, and wiping away her fast falling tears, as she presented the open letter to Julia. After having perused it attentively, and finding it laconic in the extreme, and pointedly cold in its style, she found that Laura was in truth much to blame. Not one sentiment of affection or gratitude could be traced throughout the epistle. It was evident lady O'Neal had been highly piqued at the well-meant admonition of

her aunt, and the positive determination to refuse all farther supplies of money.

Julia returned the letter, and, as far as possible, excused the want of affection with which it was written.—"Laura had," she said, "no doubt written in great haste; her next would be more satisfactory."

Soon after this conversation, Mr. Morland arrived at the Priory; and Mrs. Denningham did not fail to consult him respecting her intention of leaving England, and proceeding herself to Jamaica. This, as she partly expected, he objected to most vehemently; but failed in convincing her of the impracticability of the whole scheme, which, he said, was the wildest he had ever heard of.

"How then shall we arrange respecting this same business?" inquired the old lady. "I have no trusty emissary; and something must be done, or I shall never receive the remittances due. I have no other resource left, for I have sent my last guinea to Laura; though, at the same time, I took care to let her know it would positively be the last she should receive of me."

"I need not remind you of my opinion, relative to this weak indulgence of lady O'Neal's thoughtless extravagance; remember it is not only yourself you are injuring, but that innocent and far better girl, your niece Julia," said Morland. "I will say no more on this point at present; but as to the West India business, why cannot you appoint another agent to manage your estates? he

may be more punctual in his payments."

"I think it would not be an easy matter to effect this. In the first place, I know no one whom I could confide in, any more than Danvers; and in the next, they all do as they please there: they know how difficult it is to obtain justice, even if they defraud me of my right. The best way will be for me to sell the estates, and either place the purchase-money in the funds here, or buy some place with it in England, which I can leave to Julia; which would be, in either case, more advantageous to her than foreign property, which must always be very precarious."

"And cannot this be done," inquired Mrs. Mordaunt, who was likewise pre-

sent, "without your quitting this country?"

"I fear I cannot confide sufficiently in the present agent, to depute him to sell the property," said Mrs. Denningham, who was secretly resolved to go herself to conclude the business. "I know he wishes to purchase it himself, but I should never get the money of him; for you know he has not yet paid the whole of the sum due to Charles, for that part of the estate he purchased of him on his coming of age."

"At all events, I again entreat," said Mrs. Mordaunt, "that you will not decide too hastily: I cannot endure to think of what you must suffer if you persist in going abroad, so much as you dislike a voyage; otherwise I will own, that you

have in part convinced me it would be to your advantage."

"My dear considerate friend, that is the hope which enables me to brave the inconvenience of so long a voyage; but even this evil is nothing, when compared with the advantage to be derived from my undertaking it: it is for my poor Julia I wish to go. How could I answer it to my conscience, after having brought that dear child up in expectation of a good fortune? how could I leave her utterly destitute, and not reproach myself for the great injury I had done the dear affectionate girl? No, I had rather endure any sufferings, any hardships, than leave her thus pennyless. If my next accounts are not more favourable, and Mr. Danvers does not appear likely, to settle the business to

my satisfaction, I will this very next spring set out for the West Indies!"

Mrs. Mordaunt had in part been won over by the persuasive eloquence of Mrs. Denningham, to coincide with her in the opinion, that it would be best to sell her property abroad; as her own income would then be more certain, as well as that she designed for Julia; and, to effect this most advantageously to both, it might be advisable for her to go herself to Jamaica, and claim the possession of her estates out of the hands of the dishonest agent she had hitherto employed; though it was, she said, a hazardous undertaking, and it was with the utmost reluctance she was induced to sanction so wild a scheme with even a slight portion of approbation. But she saw her friend was more than com-

monly positive, and she was unwilling to irritate her feelings by continued opposition, which she saw too plainly would be unavailing.

Mr. Morland was not so easily silenced. He declared it was highly improper for an aged female, like her, to think of setting out, unprotected, on such a perilous expedition; and, if she persisted in going, it would be madly risking her life, in spite of the advice and warning of her best friends: she must thank her own imprudent folly for the probable consequences; but if, on the contrary, she would listen to reason, and remain in England, he would take care every thing should be done that legal means could adopt, to force Danvers to come to some explanation, satisfactory to all.

parties; and the arrears due should be required of him by the assistance of the law.

Even this assurance, and the additional one, that the estate could be sold, if she wished it, without her being on the spot, failed in convincing her. She still persisted; and as nothing more could be urged, Mr. Morland, and her equally zealous friend, gave up the point, and left it entirely to her own decision. Satisfied they had remonstrated with all the earnestness of the most devoted friendship, the result must be left to herself.

To spare the feelings of Julia, nothing of this plan had been mentioned to her; it was judged best to keep her ignorant

of it, till more fully decided on by the next letter from Mr. Danvers.

The expected letter was at length received, with the intelligence, that one half year's remittance had been paid into the hands of Mrs. Denningham's banker; and a promise of a similar sum six months from the receipt of this last. Mr. Danvers excused his want of punctuality in his payments of late years, by the alleged failure of the crops, and the great number of slaves to be purchased, in consequence of the original number being lamentably diminished by a mortality, which had prevailed in the island. Immense numbers had been swept off by the prevalence of this dreadful disease.

I have really, I think, been uncom-

monly harsh in my judgment; I have certainly wronged this man," said Mrs. Denningham. "It appears he has, after all, done the best he could for me; I am quite pleased with his letter, there appears so much candour in it. Here is an order, too, for the remainder of the sum due to Charles. Poor fellow, he will be quite rejoiced to hear this. Did you know, that he had given me directions to place it in the funds for his intended bride, in case he should not live to claim her?" said she to Mrs. Mordaunt.

"I never heard of his intention," replied her friend, "but he is ever kind and considerate. I shall think Jane the happiest of women, when she is the wife of one so amiable and disinterested. Dear good young man! it is my fondest hope, that I may live to see him the

husband of my beloved Jane: I should then die happy."

"Talk not of dying, I beseech you," said Mrs. Denningham, "for just now I am in such good spirits from this delightful news, that I feel quite young again. Old as we now both are, I hope we have yet many happy days in store: but I have not read the whole of my letter. What does Danvers say to my selling the estate?" said she, casting her eye again over the letter, and hastily perusing its contents.—"Oh! as I thought, neither more nor less than this, that I must set out for the West Indies this spring; for he positively declares, it will be absolutely necessary that I should be present, before he can treat with any one for the purchase of the property. There are, it seems, some

deeds which I must sign: so you see it is at once decided; and I must break the intelligence to Julia, as well as I can; but not a word of the affair to Charles till I come back. Jane must remember, that in her letters to her lover she may tell her own, but none of my secrets," said the old lady, with her usual playful good humour.

END OF VOL. I.

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